



NEWS Release

Office of Richmond Mayor Tom Butt

For Immediate Release
January 22, 2018

Contact:
Alex Knox – Chief of Staff
Alex_knox@ci.richmond.ca.us
Direct: 510-621-1302
Mobile: 510-407-1926

John Lamson – Resource Media
Phone: (720) 564-0500 (x12)

CITY OF RICHMOND BECOMES NINTH COMMUNITY SEEKING TO HOLD FOSSIL FUEL COMPANIES ACCOUNTABLE AND PROTECT ITS TAXPAYERS FROM COSTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Oil, Gas, and Coal Companies Challenged for Knowingly Putting Richmond, CA Families, Businesses and Infrastructure in Jeopardy

RICHMOND, Calif., Faced with growing costs to protect its residents and businesses from climate change-related damages, the City of Richmond, California today joined the growing number of communities that are suing fossil fuel companies for knowingly contributing to climate change and to what an industry expert described as its “potentially catastrophic” consequences. The lawsuit was filed in California Superior Court in Contra Costa County.

Richmond is surrounded by water on three sides and is one of the poorest communities in the Bay Area, which makes the city both uniquely vulnerable to rising seas and exceptionally challenged in finding the resources to mitigate or adapt to the damage they cause.

Richmond Mayor Tom Butt, a long-time proponent of renewable energy stated: “With 32 miles of shoreline, more than any other city on San Francisco Bay, Richmond is at extreme risk from sea level rise. We have two rail lines, 3,000 acres of public waterfront parks, vulnerable neighborhoods, two wastewater treatment plants, and a refinery, all subject to inundation. Sea Level rise is already affecting our long-term planning and will cost our community far more than any foreseeable resources we have to mitigate it.”

The complaint asserts:

Sea level rise endangers City property and infrastructure, causing coastal flooding of low-lying areas, erosion, salinity intrusion, higher risk of liquefaction during seismic events, and storm surges. Several critical City facilities, existing roadways, wastewater treatment facilities, residential neighborhoods, industrial areas including the Port of Richmond and the Chevron Refinery, highways, rail lines, emergency response facilities, and parks have suffered and/or will suffer injuries due to sea level rise expected by the end of this century.

Like the lawsuits filed by Santa Cruz County and the City of Santa Cruz in December, today’s lawsuit seeks to hold accountable 29 oil, gas, and coal companies for damages associated with

both sea level rise and changes to the hydrologic cycle caused by greenhouse gas pollution from the companies' products, including more frequent and severe heat waves, drought, and extreme precipitation events. Recent reports from the American Meteorological Society and others confirm that these kinds of serious climate-related changes result from warming of the planet caused by increases in greenhouse gases.

"The fossil fuel companies need to be part of the solution, rather than making it worse," said Mayor Butt. "After being warned by their own experts of the potential damage, the fossil fuel industry could have taken steps to transition to a lower carbon future, but they didn't. Instead they continue to spend billions fighting public policies intended to reduce GHGs, even in some cases, while their own assets are endangered by rising seas."

The science is clear that greenhouse gas pollution from fossil fuel companies is warming the oceans and atmosphere, causing sea levels to rise, and increasing the frequency and severity of heat waves, droughts, and extreme precipitation events.

The industry has known for decades that business-as-usual combustion of their products could be "severe" or even "catastrophic." Companies were so certain of the threat that some even took steps to protect their own assets from rising seas and more extreme storms, and they developed new technologies to profit from drilling in a soon-to-be ice-free Arctic. Yet instead of taking steps to reduce the threat to others, the industry actually increased production while spending billions on public relations, lobbying, and campaign contributions to hide the truth.

According to the complaint:

Defendants have known for nearly 50 years that greenhouse gas pollution from their fossil fuel products has a significant impact on the Earth's climate and sea levels....Instead of working to reduce the use and combustion of fossil fuel products, lower the rate of greenhouse gas emissions, minimize the damage associated with continued high use and combustion of such products, and ease the transition to a lower carbon economy, Defendants concealed the dangers, sought to undermine public support for greenhouse gas regulation, and engaged in massive campaigns to promote the ever-increasing use of their products at ever greater volumes....Defendants are directly responsible for 215.9 gigatons of CO₂ emissions between 1965 and 2015, representing 17.5% of total emissions of that potent greenhouse gas during that period.

The City of Richmond is represented by its city attorneys and assisted by outside counsel from Sher Edling LLP.

###