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For immediate release:

Bay Area Physicians, Nurses, and Health Professionals Call on Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) to Pass Rule 6-5, Implement Best Available Technology at Chevron and PBF Refineries to Protect Health, and Fulfill its Commitment to Racial Equality and Protect People Over the Profits of the Fossil Fuel Industry

Video recording of press conference here.

The city of Richmond, California is an environmental sacrifice zone. For decades, pollution from the Chevron and PBF refineries has caused devastating health consequences for Richmond and its neighboring communities. Now these corporations are fighting commonsense air quality regulations that would save lives.

Today, physicians, nurses and allied health professionals from the Bay Area called on the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) to honor their mission to protect health by requiring the Chevron and PBF refineries to install wet scrubber technology, which would reduce PM by up to 90%.

“Our message to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District Board is simple: it's time to protect health over the financial interests of the fossil fuel industry,” said Amanda Millstein, MD, a primary care pediatrician in Richmond and co-founder of Climate Health now.

Particulate matter (PM) air pollution kills up to 3,000 Bay Area residents every year and is the air pollutant that is most dangerous to health. The worst source of PM pollution in the Bay Area that falls under BAAQMD jurisdiction is from the refineries’ Catalytic Cracking Units. The proposed Rule 6-5 would require that Chevron and PBF refineries install the best available technology—called wet scrubbers—which are already in place at more than half of all U.S. refineries.

Jeff Ritterman, MD, a retired cardiologist in Richmond, former Richmond City Council member and Bay Area Physicians for Social Responsibility Board Member said: “As particulate matter pollution increases, our communities also see increases in heart attacks, strokes, high blood pressure, heart failure, heart arrhythmias and cardiac deaths.”

An increasing number of studies show a correlation between PM2.5 exposure and poor pregnancy outcomes, including pre-eclampsia, a condition in which pregnant women develop high blood pressure and are at risk of seizures and even death. Teresa Munoz, MD, a Richmond obstetrician-gynecologist, said: “In the 10 years I’ve practiced in Richmond I have made this diagnosis many times. I am asking the Air District to stand with me for our mothers and babies and remain true to its mission.”

Discussing her experience treating children with asthma in the Bay Area, Karen Duderstadt, PhD, pediatric nurse practitioner and member of Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments said “The American Lung Association recently released their 2020 survey of the State of the Air in cities nationally and California has 7 cities among the top 10 cities with the poorest air quality in the U.S., San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose ranks #4 out of over 200 cities in the U.S. with pollution from daily particulate matter pollution, #7 for year-round particle pollution and for
overall ozone in our atmosphere. San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose rank #10 nationally. This is not acceptable for those of us who live and work in the Bay Area."

In June 2020, BAAQMD signed a resolution condemning racism and supporting racial justice. The BAAQMD cannot in any way live up to that resolution if it does not vote in favor of the wet scrubbers, the absence of which continues to lead to gross and inhumane racial and health inequities in the Bay Area.

“For Black Lives to truly matter, they must matter for the entire life cycle,” said Luci Riley, RN, an ICU nurse in Oakland and longtime Richmond resident. “Everyone is familiar with the adage: an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. We stand here today, unified in our message: The fossil fuel industry needs to be held accountable to our patients who live and breathe under the ravages of their toxic plume. The benefits of cleaner air for our most vulnerable patient populations far outweigh the costs for the wealthiest oil producing corporation on the face of the Earth. It must integrate life saving technology into its refinery infrastructure.”

More than 100 Bay Area physicians, nurses and other health professionals have signed a letter to the Board in anticipation of the June 2 vote, which states, “As health providers, we are entrusted with protecting public health. These statistics describing asthma rates, COVID cases, and heart disease aren't statistics to us. They are our patients. They are our community. The lifetime impact of air pollution cannot be measured only against industry profits. We must give the greatest value to environmental justice and public health and support the stricter regulation.”

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Climate Health Now organizes physicians, nurses, and allied health professionals in California to advocate for climate, health and equity and mobilizes the medical community to join the larger climate movement.

Alliance of Nurses for Health Environments promotes healthy people and healthy environments by educating and leading the nursing profession, advancing research, incorporating evidence-based practice, and influencing policy.

San Francisco Bay Physicians for Social Responsibility works to protect human life from the gravest threats to health and survival. They promote public policies that protect human health from the threats of nuclear war and other weapons of mass destruction, global environmental degradation, climate change, the epidemic of gun violence, and other social injustices in our society today.