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**Santa Barbara County Takes Important Step Toward  
Clean, Renewable Energy**

**Local community answers Refugio Oil Spill with a strong move toward  
Community Choice Energy model**

**Santa Barbara, CA, June 11, 2015**– A regional nonprofit, the Community Environmental Council (CEC), helped secure a huge win for renewable energy on Tuesday, June 10 when the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors voted to fund \$400,000 towards a feasibility study for Community Choice Energy.<sup>1</sup>

Also known as Community Choice Aggregation, this is a tool through which local governments can purchase electricity from cleaner sources like wind, solar and geothermal and use the existing utilities transmission lines to deliver that power to everyone in the community.

The County’s commitment came on the heels of a June 1 decision by Santa Barbara City Council to provide \$50,000 toward the feasibility study.<sup>2</sup> An additional \$50,000 for the study (estimated at \$500,000 total) will be raised by the Community Environmental Council.

“Today marks a landmark in the history of Santa Barbara County,” stated Jefferson Litten, CEC’s Energy Program Manager. “It is the single biggest movement toward clean energy our community has ever taken.”

The Community Choice Energy model has proved successful in communities such as Lancaster, Sonoma and Marin. Each of these communities currently utilize cleaner energy at rates competitive with – and often cheaper than – the incumbent electric utility.<sup>3</sup> These existing programs have also created innovative programs to incentivize local renewable energy projects.<sup>4</sup>

Through strategic advocacy and partnership building, CEC has been working to bring a Community Choice Energy program to Santa Barbara since 2007. Over the past several months, CEC and other community organizations held talks and public forums showcasing the potential benefits of a local Community Choice Energy program.

Momentum increased sharply after the Plains All American Pipeline oil spill on May 19, which leaked over 100,000 gallons of crude oil into the beaches and water off of Gaviota Coast.<sup>5</sup> Images of oil-coated ocean life and blackened waves flooded the media. Eager for a way to take action, community members flocked to informational forums and a large-scale rally – Stand in the Sand – which brought upwards of 500 people together to discuss solutions for moving off fossil fuels.<sup>6</sup>



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“Our non-profit has been working on this for many years, but today’s vote by the Board came about because of massive community support,” remarked Sigrid Wright, CEC’s Associate Director. “With the devastating effects of the Refugio Oil Spill fresh in our minds and hearts, clean energy has become a rallying point – something we can do to prevent this type of disaster from happening again.”

For the Community Environmental Council, this oil spill is a reminder that their work, which began in 1970 in response to the massive 1969 Santa Barbara spill, is still vital. While heartbroken by the second major dirty energy crisis in this region, those who witnessed the original spill see more reason for hope now than ever before.

“Forty-five years ago, we had no idea how to break our addiction to oil,” said Paul Relis, Emeritus Board Member and founding Executive Director of CEC. “Now we do. Now we have both the policy tools and the technology to make this transition, and today’s vote proves it.”

Hundreds of community members signed their names in support of Community Choice Energy, and more than 20 businesses and organizations advocated on its behalf at the June 10 board hearing, including the [World Business Academy](#), [Environmental Defense Center](#), [CALPIRG](#), [VCCOOL](#), and [Santa Barbara County Action Network](#).

As Santa Barbara County moves forward with the feasibility study, they will also determine if any nearby jurisdictions are interested in participating. The Community Environmental Council will meanwhile turn its attention to public education and outreach to help the Santa Barbara region understand what this new program means for individuals, businesses, and the environment.

To follow developments of Santa Barbara’s Community Choice Energy program, visit [SBCEnergyChoice.org](http://SBCEnergyChoice.org).

**About the Community Environmental Council**

In the wake of the devastating 1969 oil spill off Santa Barbara’s shores, a group of local concerned citizens began talking about a different way of looking at environmental systems, and the Community Environmental Council was born. During that time, Senator Gaylord Nelson visited Santa Barbara to view the oil spill’s damage. When he returned to Washington, D.C., he introduced a bill designating April 22 as a national day to celebrate the earth, sparking a national environmental movement. In CEC’s first act as a nonprofit, it hosted one of the first Earth Day celebrations in the U.S. in 1970.

Since that time, CEC has remained at the forefront of the environmental movement, leading the Santa Barbara region – and at times California and the nation – in creative solutions to some of the toughest environmental problems. CEC’s work focuses on moving our region off of fossil fuels and protecting the climate. We encourage global change through local action with five initiatives: Drive Less, Choose Electric, Go Solar, Ditch Plastic, and Eat Local.



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**For more information on CEC:**

- Find CEC on the web at [cecsb.org](http://cecsb.org)
- Like CEC on Facebook at [facebook.com/cecsb](https://facebook.com/cecsb)
- Follow CEC on Twitter @CECSB and on Instagram @CEC\_SB
- Call CEC at 805-963-0583 ext.100

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