

Clean energy can help California fight climate change and prepare for wildfire season

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When you are stuck in a hole, putting down the shovel is the first step to getting out.

Unfortunately, such wisdom does not always translate into emergency preparedness. As California braces for another fire season and climate-related extreme events, are we better prepared to meet energy demands and maintain a reliable source of electricity for California families?

Preparations for the fire season have included a rapid expansion of California's [massive fleet of fossil fuel-powered backup power generators](#). Thousands of megawatts of new diesel power generation have been installed in the last two years, adding to the large statewide capacity that already existed prior to PG&E cutting power to millions of Northern Californians during wildfires in 2019 and 2020.

Here's the burn: Diesel generators are notorious for emitting large amounts of soot that poisons our air and dramatically contribute to the climate crisis fueling the biggest, most destructive wildfires in state history. As taxpayers and ratepayers, you have paid for much of this.

There is a better way to ensure public health and safety and build energy resilience during wildfires and other emergencies. Flexible and equitable community-based solutions are available due to rapidly declining costs for integrated, decentralized, locally produced clean energy.

On-site solar power generation coupled with battery storage technology is more cost-effective than fossil fuel backup generators over the life of the generators. This approach can provide a new revenue source when customers sell surplus power back to the power grid. It can also help curb energy demand at peak hours to prevent blackouts without air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

Building upon California's history of energy policy innovation, California should initiate a new state policy framework — grounded in local community empowerment — to secure a clean, resilient and equitable power grid. Communities should be engaged at the beginning, not the end, of the energy resilience planning process.

Local governments that understand and reflect the local needs of their most impacted communities should collaborate to install new community-scale energy infrastructure such as solar panels, battery storage and electric vehicle charging stations in compliance with local land use and planning ordinances. Priority should be given to enhancing energy resilience for vulnerable communities that suffer the most from [air pollution](#) and power outages. Our

communities should be deciding what facilities are critical and whose lights stay on during a crisis — not big utilities.

In order to achieve this vision for energy equity and resilience, state Sen. Bill Dodd has authored Senate Bill 99, the Community Energy Resilience Act. It calls for the creation of a technical assistance and grant program to enable local governments to develop community energy resilience plans, prioritizing vulnerable communities.

Plans are a necessary precondition to attracting private and public investments in community energy resilience projects, which is particularly important as federal lawmakers contemplate a new trillion-dollar infrastructure package. Therefore, this legislation could leverage the millions of dollars that ratepayers have already invested in clean energy micro-grids.

Climate change is already here, hitting California harder and faster than expected. Wildfires cost the state hundreds of billions of dollars in damages to our health from breathing toxic air and in damages our property and our economy. Just last week, Gov. Gavin Newsom and state lawmakers cut a \$536 million deal to brace for this year's fire season. This merry go round of enormous expenses will continue until we address the source of the problem: climate change.

It's time for lawmakers to step up and support bills like SB 99 to protect communities through the formation of a clean, affordable, resilient, equitable and safe power grid. For a vibrant and healthy future for all Californians, it is the only path forward.

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