

Case Study: Scattergood Generating Station - A Battle Over Hydrogen Greenwashing

Overview

The Scattergood Generating Station, located in Playa del Rey near Los Angeles International Airport, has become a defining case for understanding how fossil fuel industries are attempting to prolong the life of gas-fired power plants under the guise of “clean hydrogen.” The struggle around Scattergood illustrates both the power of grassroots environmental justice (EJ) advocacy and the countermoves by utilities and industry stakeholders. This case offers critical lessons for climate and EJ organizers across the country.

Phase One: Securing the 2019 Phase-Out Commitment

Context

Scattergood, along with the Haynes and Harbor coastal gas plants, faced mandatory shutdown deadlines due to California’s **once-through-cooling (OTC) regulations**, which aimed to protect coastal ecosystems from high-temperature discharge water.

In 2018–2019, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) considered **rebuilding the plants with new gas turbines**, locking in decades of fossil fuel reliance.

Community and Political Action

- **Grassroots Mobilization:** Communities for a Better Environment (CBE), Sierra Club’s My Generation campaign, Food & Water Watch, and local neighborhood coalitions mobilized residents from frontline neighborhoods (Wilmington, Playa del Rey, Long Beach).
- **Environmental Justice Framing:** Advocates emphasized air pollution burdens in already over-polluted communities of color and the incompatibility of new gas infrastructure with Los Angeles’ climate goals.
- **Public Pressure:** Packed LADWP commission meetings and City Council hearings, highlighting both health harms and viable alternatives.
- **Policy Research:** Groups lifted up emerging findings from the [LA100 study](#) showing pathways to 100% renewable energy without new gas.
- **Targeted Mayoral Pressure:** At the time, Mayor Eric Garcetti chaired the **C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group**, making him sensitive to international scrutiny. Campaigners used this position to elevate LA’s decision as a global climate credibility test.

Outcome

In February 2019, Garcetti announced that Los Angeles would not repower the coastal gas plants and would phase them out by 2029, framing it as a core piece of LA's Green New Deal. This was a landmark EJ victory.

Phase Two: Industry Pushback and the Hydrogen Pivot (2023–Present)

Context

- By 2023, LADWP shifted from gas repowering to a plan to build “[hydrogen-ready](#)” turbines at Scattergood.
- The proposal: retire old OTC units by 2029, but replace them with new turbines capable of burning a 30% hydrogen / 70% fossil gas blend (by volume), aiming for higher hydrogen percentages later. This proposed fuel blend with 30% hydrogen by volume is in reality [only 12% hydrogen](#) based on the amount of energy contained in that fuel, because hydrogen is less dense than fossil gas. The first hydrogen-ready units are planned to come online at the Scattergood site in 2029.

Industry-Driven Narrative

- **Reliability Framing:** LADWP claimed hydrogen-ready turbines were necessary to maintain grid reliability.
- **Green Hydrogen Marketing:** Utilities and gas industry allies framed the plan as a step toward a “clean energy future,” despite ongoing reliance on fossil gas; no identified means of producing, transporting, nor storing green hydrogen; and the unproven nature of large-scale hydrogen combustion.
- **Political Support:** In 2023, the LA City Council [voted to authorize](#) the ~\$800 million retrofit, aligning with LADWP's [Strategic Long-Term Resource Plan](#).

Community and EJ Pushback

- **Greenwashing Exposed:** EJ groups reframed hydrogen blending as a “bait-and-switch” strategy designed to extend fossil fuel infrastructure.
- **Public Health Critique:** Physicians for Social Responsibility – Los Angeles highlighted that hydrogen combustion still generates nitrogen oxide (NOx) pollution, threatening local health.
- **Ratepayer Risk:** Advocates pointed to the enormous retrofit costs, emphasizing that residents—not utilities—would foot the bill.
- **CEQA Mobilization:** During the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) process, groups filed detailed comments and mobilized community testimony opposing the hydrogen retrofit.
- **National Context:** Organizers tied Scattergood to broader critiques of the federal Hydrogen Hub program, arguing California's ARCHES hub was being co-opted by fossil fuel interests.

Current Status

- LADWP's board [approved](#) the project in November 2025.
- Federal rollbacks under the Trump Administration (loss of 45V tax credits, weakened EPA rules) have thrown hydrogen projects into uncertainty. Many are stalled or canceled, though LADWP continues to defend its modernization plans.
- Scattergood remains a flashpoint: community groups are pushing for closure and replacement with

renewables and storage, while industry is working to preserve it as a fossil fuel site under the facade of green hydrogen.

Power Mapping Insights

- **Mayor Eric Garcetti:** As chair of C40 Cities in 2019, Garcetti was vulnerable to climate credibility pressure. Campaigners successfully leveraged his global profile.
- **LADWP:** Both utility leadership and its unions have historically emphasized grid reliability, creating tension with decarbonization goals.
- **City Council:** Unanimous in supporting the hydrogen-ready plan in 2023, but sensitive to public cost and reliability narratives.
- **Industry Allies:** SoCalGas and hydrogen lobbyists frame blending as a win-win, tying it to jobs and energy security.
- **Community Power:** EJ coalitions successfully linked local health, climate justice, and ratepayer fairness, turning Scattergood into a national case study.

Lessons for Organizers in Other Regions

- **Frame Hydrogen as a Fossil Lifeline:** Expose how blending perpetuates fossil gas dependence and delays real clean energy.
- **Leverage Political Vulnerabilities:** Identify leaders' external roles (e.g., Garcetti's chairmanship of C40) and align campaigns with their reputational incentives.
- **Mobilize Local Health Impacts:** Hydrogen combustion still produces dangerous pollutants—this resonates with frontline community concerns.
- **Challenge Cost Burdens:** \$800M retrofits are tangible talking points to show how ratepayers subsidize false solutions.
- **Engage in Regulatory Processes:** CEQA, state utility commissions, and local planning bodies are critical intervention points.
- **Build Coalitions Across Scales:** Connect local fights (like Scattergood) to national and global hydrogen debates to amplify pressure and share resources.

Conclusion

The Scattergood case shows how communities can win commitments to close dirty power plants—and how industry can pivot to hydrogen as a delay tactic. Thanks to Communities for a Better Environment, Physicians for Social Responsibility and advocates across California for their contributions to this study. For EJ organizers, it underscores the need to:

- Celebrate early wins but stay vigilant against rollback efforts.
- Pair grassroots mobilization with sharp policy critique.
- Develop strategies that expose hydrogen greenwashing and push for truly renewable, just energy systems.