

Group Sets Plan To Stop Oil And Gas

HENDERSON, NV.—A multiyear strategy “to reform the operations of the oil and gas industry in the United States” is revealed in a document distributed at the June 12 meeting of the Liaison Committee of Cooperating Oil & Gas Associations in Henderson.

The document, which was obtained by the Colorado Oil & Gas Association, outlines an organized campaign that has been styled NoDOG, or “No Dirty Oil and Gas.”

According to the document, a large coalition of nongovernmental organizations has coalesced around a six-year strategy that includes an emphasis on climate change, but “increasingly will focus on oil and gas operations in the U.S. West. The highlight of the activities . . . will be an overarching, multi-issue strategy focused on . . . oil and gas operations.”

The initial phase of the campaign, the document says, will focus on New Mexico and Colorado. In New Mexico, the document notes, “Governor Bill Richardson has hinted he will run for the presidency in 2008. Environmentalists believe they (can) build campaigns that play into Richardson’s ambitions and win support for numerous statewide initiatives that will hamper oil and gas development in the state.”

Specifically, the document indicates, the New Mexico strategy calls for:

- Passing a surface owners’ protection law; and
- Banning the use of unlined production pits.

Winning specific legislation in Colorado is the coalition’s second-highest state priority, the document continues, explaining that NoDOG intends to seek laws and regulations that will require companies to disclose the chemicals they use in producing oil and gas with the objective of granting the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment authority to demand disclosure and monitoring of chemical releases, and ultimately to “develop rules that would prevent negative health impacts from oil and gas operations.”

“Outside the context of the larger Mountain West strategy, the groups also will begin to push in earnest for the protection of specific places, starting with the Valle Vidal in New Mexico, with the intention of building support for increased lands protection in many other areas, such as parts of the Alaska Strategic Petroleum

Reserve and Wyoming,” the document adds.

NoDOG Strategy

The document provided by COGA explains that the NoDOG strategy is a three-year plan “designed to win a complete restructuring of the laws governing terrestrial oil and gas operations. Among the key issues that the strategy plans to address are what the activists call the degradation of public lands, the use and liberation of toxic metals and chemicals in oil and gas operations, drilling-waste treatment, and surface owner protection.”

The strategy has two elements, the document points out. “The first is a series of state-based campaigns,” it says. “These campaigns will advocate specific pieces of state legislation, each of which will address one of the priority regionwide issues. Passing one of these state laws . . . will be used by members of the coalition in other states to justify a similar state law.

“According to this strategy,” the document reveals, “once a number of states have passed such laws, national groups will argue that the federal government should harmonize the statutes.”

In parallel with the state campaigns, NoDOG intends to wage a market campaign, the document says. “The campaign will not focus on a specific target until 2008, but its goal will be to win major concessions from one or two major oil and gas operators in the West,” it outlines. “These concessions will form the basis for a code of conduct that will be offered to others in the industry. The campaign figures that if two or three companies sign on to the code of conduct, it will weaken industry’s hand at the state level and in Congress, (since) some in the industry will be on record as supporting elements of the NoDOG legislative proposals.”

During phase one of the market campaign in 2007, the document states, NoDOG will:

- Issue a report outlining problems with oil and gas operations;
- Recruit “victim groups” that can be profiled and called on to testify at state and federal levels;
- Broaden its membership to “increase the number of traditional Republican constituencies and ‘hook-and-bullet’ enthusiasts;” and

- Publicize the relationship between the negative effects of oil and gas operations and specific products, including gasoline and plastics.

“By the end of 2007, the goal of the market campaign aspect of the NoDOG strategy is to have increased perception nationwide that oil and gas operations cause environmental damage and health effects—particularly to children—and generally anger local residents,” the COGA document says. “The goal is to set the stage for a corporate campaign where a single corporation will be singled out as causing a litany of health and community problems in the West.”

Code Of Conduct

The goal of the NoDOG strategy, according to the COGA document, is to introduce the concept that oil and gas operations have negative consequences for surface owners and for public health. The NoDOG coalition “believes that if it is able to simultaneously bring national attention to the West as an environmental battleground and also pass two of the three major state efforts, it will have a solid platform from which to begin its second phase.”

That phase, the document says, will be highlighted by distributing a code of conduct for the industry. “The code of conduct will encompass a number of existing state laws, and companies that sign on will agree not to use the proscribed methods in any state—not just those where they are illegal,” the document explains. “Meanwhile, activists will single out one of the major players in the industry as a particularly bad actor. This target will receive considerable negative publicity that the activists believe will both distract corporate leadership and make permitting more difficult for the company that has been singled out.”

By 2009, the document concludes, the NoDOG coalition hopes to have convinced at least one company to sign the code of conduct. “It will then present the code and a selection of new state laws to Congress as the basis for arguing that the federal government is far behind industry and the states in protecting the public from oil and gas operations,” the document says. “The market campaign and the state laws will then, together form the basis for a new federal law governing oil and gas.” □