

Dear Members of the Board:

I am writing you on behalf of many residents of Santa Cruz County who have suddenly become aware of County plans to construct grid-scale BESS facilities on several sites in the County and who are very concerned about the safety of siting these facilities in or very near dense urban and suburban residential communities, schools, hospitals, farmland and protected natural sanctuaries.

It is unacceptable for a foundational infrastructural change on the scale of a 14 to 16 acre BESS facility literally on Watsonville's doorstep to be virtually absent from civic dialogue for 5 years, since 2019 when New Leaf Energy first started "working" amidst local property owners for a place to site their industrial-scale facility. Not a word to your constituents even after Supervisor Hernandez and former Supervisor McPherson proposed it to the board in 2019 and New Leaf Energy submitted their application – an application submitted furthermore before a BESS Ordinance was even written, let alone adopted.

I ask respectfully that you, the Board, immediately make information about these plans readily, transparently and completely available to the public. The current placement of the Seahawk Energy Storage project is nearly impossible to navigate to on the County website, requiring navigation through 5 website pages.

I also ask that you support Assemblymember Dawn Addis' bill AB 303 – 2025, which returns siting decision-making power to local communities.

Furthermore, I support California's carbon footprint and EV mandates and the need for sweeping infrastructural change to meet current set deadlines focused on 2035 and 2045 successfully. However, achieving those green goals cannot come at the cost of toxic disasters bred from technology that has outstripped in its application the means to safely regulate it.

That means BESS installations must be aligned with effective fire suppression techniques. Clearly, self-combusting lithium-ion battery using BESS facilities are unsafe.

New Leaf Energy Storage is proposing the newer LFP battery for their Seahawk Energy Storage project, citing the industry standard that this lithium using battery does not self-ignite and therefore is safe enough to use. It is not immune to burning, however. Severe short circuit from faulty wiring can result in combustion as well as many other manufacturing flaws, and aging components and housing. Our central coast area is disaster prone, with both high earthquake and wild fire risk. What happens in the event of a larger disaster or in the event that for any reason an LFP using BESS facility or sections of it goes up in flames?

Right now, lithium batteries are a dominating technology, but their continued use into the next decades as we go green is increasingly under question. This is because the lithium battery is dirty technology, involving dirty extraction, a high production footprint and a high recycling footprint. There are other, safer, cheaper and more environmentally friendly battery technologies being explored aggressively right now and they will certainly be available in the near future.

If we invest in LFP technology today, would we be able to upgrade the facility later? At what cost?

We need to slow this infrastructural change down, so that we can ensure that battery energy storage technology and its safety protocols and regulations keep up with its installation.

Thank you.  
Nina Audino

Dear Members of the Board:

My name is Nina Audino. I have been a resident of Santa Cruz County for 37 years. I live in District 2.

In the wake of the Moss Landing Vistra BESS facility fire, I am here to urge you to enact an emergency moratorium on lithium battery using BESS facilities in Santa Cruz County while County staff works with New Leaf Energy and independent industry experts to identify where we want BESS facilities developed and safety regulations that actually protect the safety and health of our community, our agricultural infrastructure and our natural environment.

I also urge you to establish an advisory committee of independent, professional industry experts to advise the County Board on appropriate siting and regulations that could and should be more restrictive than current state regulations, as well as on alternative battery technology that is, in fact, clean and a better investment into the future.

The movement that questions the wisdom of investing in lithium battery using BESS facilities is growing.

Orange County just passed an emergency moratorium on BESS facility development on unincorporated county land pending a thorough investigation of appropriate siting and regulations.

In January of 2023, New Leaf Energy pulled its plans to build a BESS facility next to a church and immediately adjacent to six schools in a dense residential area of Staten Island.

In November of 2024, another BESS developer withdrew its plans for a grid-scale facility in the town of Catskill in New York state.

New Leaf Energy's proposed Seahawk facility is within several hundred feet of dense residential neighborhoods, surrounded by multiple nearby schools, Pinto Park, precious agricultural land, a protected riparian zone, two lakes, one of which is part of a clean water reclamation project that

irrigates Pajaro Valley farmland, a proposed new residential development and a proposed new regional Park.

An active fault line runs through the property the facility is sited on. It is surrounded by acres of fuel in the event of a wild fire.

Energy storage is a critically needed resource to achieve a decarbonized electric grid. I agree with the concept behind it, but it must not be at the cost of our safety.

The reality is lithium using battery storage facilities raise serious concerns for public safety and the environment. And while battery storage facilities may be the future of energy infrastructure, current lithium battery using technology does not belong in residential communities.

Too many factors can make these batteries catch fire — too much water, lightning, wildfire, damaged casings, being too hot or too cold, hidden defects and recharging malfunctions, malfunctions in the supporting equipment, to name just a few causes. And there is no firefighting technology to stop lithium fire once it is in flame.

Longer-term, lithium battery fires risk jeopardizing the operations of the electrical grid. Battery storage is poised to replace outdated peaker plants, storing clean power and injecting it into the grid during hours of peak demand. The technology can't deliver if it burns and then remains inoperational for months of investigations and refurbishment.

Again, I ask you to slow down the permitting process for the New Leaf Energy BESS planned for 90 Minto Road, enact a moratorium on lithium using BESS facilities in Santa Cruz County and appoint an expert, professional advisory committee to advise you on appropriate siting and regulations, as well as on alternative battery technology that is, in fact, clean and a better investment into the future.

Thank you,  
Nina Audino

Dear Members of the Board:

My name is Nina Audino. I've been a resident of Santa Cruz County for 37 years. I live in District 2.

Thank you Supervisors de Serpa and Koenig for taking the time to speak with me about the planned installation of grid-scale BESS facilities using lithium battery technology. Thank you, Maureen McCarty, analyst for Supervisor de Serpa, who took time out of her busy day to speak with me. I asked you all to please hold a town hall meeting as soon as possible and include the public in this huge infrastructural change currently already in permitting stages. I also asked you to support an Urgency Ordinance for a Moratorium on this BESS development until an impartial, expert Advisory Committee can help advise you on lithium battery technology.

I want to apologize as well to Supervisor Hernandez for my words during comment at the January 28 Board meeting, stating that he and Bruce McPherson first introduced the BESS plans in 2019. Indeed, you did not introduce them at that time, and yet the lead project manager for the Seahawk BESS at 90 Minto Road, which is now in permitting stages, Max Christian stated transparently to the local news group *Lookout Santa Cruz* that their company has been working in our County on the Seahawk BESS project since 2019.

Five years is a very long time for an energy developer to be working amidst us on a BESS installation using lithium battery technology. And yet, until the toxic lithium battery fire disaster at Vistra's Moss Landing plant, most of the public had no information on these plans. In fact, even 5 days before Sequoia Energy and New Leaf Energy submitted their application for permitting last December 17 to the Planning Division, most of the public still had no information on these plans. This is because the only people speaking with the public were representatives of New Leaf Energy, at one very poorly attended meeting on December 12 at Amesti School advertised on a post card and sent only to residents within a half mile of the planned lithium BESS facility with the time of the meeting missing.

Lithium batteries burn. Period. The dangers from the newer, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation supposedly safer lithium battery technology remain the same: thermal instability, explosions, catastrophic fires.

We, all of us together and our children will have to live with the severe health risks and long-term environmental contamination from the toxic smoke, ash, chemicals and heavy metals resulting from lithium battery fires in BESS plants.

Please help me keep my faith in our representative, democratic process. Please hold a town hall meeting on the lithium BESS installations planned for our county with those whom you are called on to represent.

Thank you,

Nina Audino

Dear Members of the Board:

My name is Nina Audino, resident of Santa Cruz County.

By recent official Santa Cruz County accounts, agriculture in our county is worth a neat billion annually. And how much is a child's life worth to us? How about the lives of all the children living in a 2-mile radius around your proposed Seahawk BESS facility just outside of Watsonville? What are they worth?

Because Moss Landing Marine Lab Professor Aiello has testified as an expert in his research field that the highest concentrations of heavy metal toxins from Vistra's catastrophic battery fire at Moss Landing are not right next to the site, but instead 1 to 2 miles out.

How many children live on a 2-mile radius around the proposed Seahawk BESS at 90 Minto Road? How many schools are there? Children's parks? Community Centers? Hospitals and doctors' offices? How many back yards and other wildflower covered corners where children play?

Ah – but no worries, you will say. The containerized fires will be so much smaller and less toxic. They will not spread much at all. Only less than a 100' from the 300 containers planned for the utility-scale facility.

So, are we going to listen to and believe Senator Laird, introducing his "Clean" Energy Safety Act of 2025, [SB 283] by claiming that first responders "contained" the toxic 250' tall flames at Moss Landing? What containment? There was no containment. You cannot contain a lithium fire. Moss Landing burned without containment until the toxic lithium batteries burned themselves out.

Are we going to listen to the California Energy Storage Alliance lobby, where Vistra sits as a top-tier contributor, declaim falsely in a meeting with Newsom's office that all tests conducted to date have found no present

danger, despite it being the largest battery storage fire in U.S. history? Should we listen to their false claims that any future incidents, should they occur, would have significantly less impact, as less than one percent of Moss Landing's energy storage capacity would be at risk due to the industry's transition to containerized storage?

Really? Ask any battery engineer who is not on an energy developer's payroll to guarantee that there will never be a containerized lithium fire that will burn through a container and spread to others. Ask them to guarantee that new generation LFP batteries are 100% fire and explosion risk free. Ask them to guarantee how the winds will blow on the day the fire spreads.

There is no guarantee possible. A local Watsonville business owner stated to me recently, "There is nothing complex here. In any other business, failure to produce fire technology capable of extinguishing a chemical fire would mean an immediate application denial."

As a community that values the lives and future of our children as something far greater than profit margins, we need to put the onus on contracted energy developers to definitively prove that their battery energy storage facilities will cause no harm before their plans are accepted. Clean energy should never come at the expense of public safety.

I urge you to enact an Urgency Ordinance moratorium. Convene an impartial Technical Advisory Committee who will work with all of the stakeholders, including the public, to prioritize safety. Hold a Town Hall and give the people a voice. Listen to your constituents.

Thank you.

Nina Audino



Dear Members of the Board:

My name is Nina Audino. I live in Santa Cruz County in rural Corralitos.

I want to thank you again for your right action in slowing down our county's adoption of a BESS Ordinance. And I urge you to act further to protect the best interests of your constituents – of all of us who live together in this county.

Convene an impartial Technical Advisory Committee that is not limited to New Leaf Energy's hired hands, who represent the developer's best interests, tied first and last to their business profits. We need all stakeholders, including the public, assisting with a transparent process of crafting a BESS Ordinance that makes health and safety a priority for our communities and environment. We need fire experts, battery engineers and former BESS developers on our Technical Advisory Committee.

And what about a Town Hall? Why are you not inviting the public to the table in this critical community process? What are you afraid of? Don't you want to trust the democratic process? Don't you want to uphold it?

Listening to the public will gain you critically important insights that you are blinded to if you persist in delimiting yourselves to sitting in the box of marketing ads designed for you by the developer, whose overriding goals are profit and a return on their investments. Surely you must know that.

Currently the world's two largest battery manufacturers – CATL and BYD have already begun large-scale sodium-ion production – already rolling out SIB batteries in mass numbers. So is Natron, a Santa Clara based SIB manufacturer with one facility already producing and another huge manufacturing facility in construction in North Carolina. That puts SIB batteries high on the Technological Readiness Level, arguably at a 9, the highest tier – the TRL Technological Readiness Lever is a market system designed to measure the maturity level of a particular technology, ranging from a 1 at the bottom for basic research to a 9 at

the top for full deployment. Japan is heavily investing in SIB research with plans to transition out of an unsustainable lithium dependent energy infrastructure. CATL projects a market shift in which sodium-ion batteries replace up to half of the market for lithium iron phosphate batteries.

All lithium-ion batteries burn, regardless of type or generation. It is absolutely unacceptable to rush into installing a battery tech that is proven dangerous – proven to be highly flammable and explosive, a risk that increases predictably the higher the numbers of batteries in one installation, like in a large BESS, and the longer they are stressed with use.

Sodium-ion batteries are less dense than lithium-ion, but they are catching up, currently offering two thirds of the density of LFB. Wouldn't you trade some manageably lower density for guaranteed fire and explosion and toxicity free safety? I know I would.

Sodium-ion batteries cost less, are recyclable, offer a higher cycle life – and most importantly, they are safe. They are not flammable and have no risk of thermal runaway. But you won't hear this if you listen exclusively to New Leaf Energy's corporate pitch.

Again, please convene an impartial Technical Advisory Committee that includes all stakeholders, including the public, to assist with a transparent process of crafting a BESS Ordinance that makes health and safety a priority for our communities and environment.

Thank you.

Nina Audino