



FW: Opposition to AES Industrial Solar Facility Development Near Residential Areas

From Gabriel C. Bustos <gcbustos@santafecountynm.gov>

Date Tue 6/17/2025 12:54 PM

To Dominic J. Sisneros <djsisneros@santafecountynm.gov>

Cc Hank Hughes <hhughes@santafecountynm.gov>

From: William Russell <russellsroost@icloud.com>

Sent: Tuesday, June 17, 2025 11:46 AM

To: Hank Hughes <hhughes@santafecountynm.gov>

Cc: Gabriel C. Bustos <gcbustos@santafecountynm.gov>

Subject: Re: Opposition to AES Industrial Solar Facility Development Near Residential Areas

Warning:

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William Russell

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June 17, 2025

Hank Hughes

Santa Fe Board of Commissioners District 5
PO Box 276
Santa Fe, NM 87504-0276
[\(505\) 986-6210](tel:(505)986-6210)

Dear Commissioner Hughes,

I am writing as a concerned resident of Santa Fe County District 5 to formally express my strong opposition to the proposed industrial-scale solar energy project being planned by AES in our county. As currently understood, the project would include the installation of over **200,000 solar panels** and approximately **570,000 lithium-ion batteries**, in close proximity to residential neighborhoods and in a region classified by state and federal agencies as prone to **high winds and wildfire hazards**.

While I support renewable energy initiatives, this particular project raises serious safety, environmental, and quality-of-life concerns. Industrial battery installations of this magnitude, especially lithium-ion,

pose **significant fire and explosion risks**, particularly in fire-prone zones. Numerous documented incidents across the country underscore the danger of thermal runaway events in large-scale battery storage systems.

Notable incidents involving AES-built facilities

- **Otay Mesa, CA (May 2024):** A thermal-fire at AES's SDG&E-linked site lasted ~17 days; evacuations and shelter-in-place orders followed. Despite smoky odor reports, pollutants weren't deemed hazardous
 - This fire produced **thick black smoke** laced with combustion by-products—including potential toxins—raising major health concerns
 - Authorities warned nearby facilities (prisons, businesses) to **seal buildings, shut off HVAC**, and avoid outdoor exposure due to hazardous fumes
 - Over **50 firefighters**, multiple hazmat teams, plus drones and remote robots were mobilized
 - Local fire services expended extensive man-hours and specialized resources to monitor and suppress ongoing thermal events.
- **Escondido/San Marcos (Sept 2022): Third AES BESS thermal runaway fire in five years**, triggering widespread evacuation and a multi-day emergency response
 - Nearly **500 businesses** and multiple schools—including the Escondido Union School District offices—were evacuated or closed for up to **48 hours**
 - Following the fire, **Escondido's City Council** adopted a resolution opposing large BESS developments near homes, citing safety, health, property values, and emergency response concerns. A moratorium on new battery projects was also implemented
- **Chandler, AZ (Apr 2022):** Fire at an AES-operated facility adjacent to SRP substation; firefighters monitored from outside and confirmed no air-quality threats
 - Fire smoldered for nearly two weeks. Detected on April 18; the automatic sprinkler system kept it from escalating, but smoldering persisted until around May 1
 - Firefighters used a defensive strategy—robots opened building doors to ventilate hazardous gases before crews entered
 - Ventilation via forced airflow helped manage chemical-laden smoke before full re-entry by fire crews

Despite compliance with UL and NFPA safety standards, these fires still occurred—raising the question of whether such safeguards are truly adequate in high-risk environments like ours. Even “state-of-the-art” facilities face **multi-day fight backs, toxic plume release**, and **significant public health measures**. Placing this facility near homes introduces an unacceptable level of danger to residents, including potential health impacts, reduced property values, and strain on local emergency resources.

Additional concerns include potential harm to local wildlife, stormwater runoff contamination, and infrastructure stress during construction and operation.

Given these risks, I urge you and the board to:

1. Reconsider approval or permitting of this project;

2. Require a comprehensive localized fire risk and emergency response analysis, not just reliance on generic industry norms;
3. Ensure public transparency regarding AES's hazard mitigation plan and the scope of first responder training;
4. Mandate a full environmental impact review and a public comment period before any further decisions are made.

Santa Fe County deserves energy solutions that are safe, resilient, and responsibly located. Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your ongoing service to our community.

Sincerely,

William Allen Russell II

Cc: Gabriel Bustos (Constituent Services Liaison)

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