



TO: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment
FROM: PCUN
SUBJECT: Support Making Polluters Pay - Support SB 1187

April 7, 2025

Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Brock Smith, and members of the Committee,

My name is Cynthia Ramirez, and I am a Policy Associate with PCUN, Oregon's Farmworker Union. At PCUN, we work to empower farmworkers and Latinx working families to improve their working and living conditions through community building, organizing, and policy advocacy.

Today, I am testifying in support of SB 1187 which would require large fossil fuel firms to pay compensation for past climate change damages. For too long, low income communities, communities of color, and tribal nations have been significantly impacted by pollution and climate change, while the largest corporate polluters have profited without consequence. Those responsible for causing the climate crisis should help for the damages they have caused. Our communities have been experiencing an increase in extreme weather conditions and they are bearing the burden both financially and physically due to the actions of large multinational companies.

Farmworkers are the backbone of Oregon's agriculture industry and have been risking their lives working in extremely dangerous weather conditions. Research reports that farmworkers are 35 times more likely to suffer from heat-related deaths compared to other industries.¹ Farmworkers are at an increased risk for many of the most serious health consequences of climate change, such as heat-related illness, given that their work involves heavy exertion in an outdoor setting.²

One of our members stated the following:

"Many times, I worked in extreme heat, and it is truly dangerous, especially when there is not enough water to stay hydrated. We run the risk of severe heat

¹ Gubernot, Diane M., et al. "Characterizing occupational heat-related mortality in the United States, 2000-2010: an analysis using the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries database." *Am J Ind Med.*, 2015. National Library of Medicine, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4657558/>. Accessed 21 02 2025.

² <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25198688/>

exhaustion. Working in those conditions affected me physically, especially because the water we were given to drink was not clean, and we often suffered from stomach illnesses.”

Continued exposure to high temperature and heat extremes may cause several HRI, including heat rash, fainting, heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke.³ Another member stated:

“I saw workers collapse from heat stress and suffer injuries. After years of working in the fields, I now have rheumatism.”

With regards to wildfires and wildfire smoke, there are studies that compare Air Quality Index (AQI) levels between 100-200 to smoking a quarter to a half pack of cigarettes a day.⁴ During the 2020 wildfires, we experienced AQI levels well above 500 which is considered hazardous and yet, farmworkers were still harvesting our crops in these conditions. One of our farmworker members stated:

“During wildfires, we breathed in smoke and toxins while doing heavy labor, making the work even harder and more dangerous.”

Our farmworker community is suffering the consequences of the large fossil fuel firms who put business over the safety and well-being of our environment and Oregonians. It is only fair for the companies who pollute to take on the responsibility.

I urge your support of SB 1187. Thank you for listening.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Ramirez
Policy Associate
PCUN

³ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4199019/#abstract1>

⁴ <https://www.npr.org/2025/01/31/nx-s1-5276397/wildfires-and-outdoor-workers>