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CONTACT: Becca Berggren

boulevardimpact@gmail.com / (619)838-4860

One of the largest BESS projects in the region proposed for high-fire-risk Boulevard as San Diego County is still considering siting rules.

Residents ask Board of Supervisors to vote no on Starlight Solar, citing an 868-MWh battery sited near homes and a school in a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone, and threatened groundwater wells

BOULEVARD, CA - The San Diego County Board of Supervisors is expected to vote on the [Starlight Solar](#) project on September 16th. The 588-acre proposal pairs about 100 MW of solar generation with a 217.4 MW / 868 MWh lithium-ion battery energy storage system (BESS) making it one of the largest BESS in the state. Battery arrays are proposed next to homes and an elementary school in rural East County, within a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone. Boulevard has no municipal water service. Residents depend entirely on private groundwater wells, which raises the stakes of any fire event that could send contaminated runoff or smoke-plume deposition into the ground they draw water from.

Boulevard residents are asking the Board to reject the project, and are doing so as the County is separately developing new BESS zoning rules, a process not yet complete. Central to their opposition: an industrial-scale battery facility of this size sited this close to family homes and a school, in a landscape that already burns and an [Environment Impact Report](#) that admits it will cause “**Significant and Unavoidable Impacts**”.

The issue has drawn sustained media attention over the past six months, with outlets covering community town halls and the Planning Commission hearing as the project moved toward this Board decision.

Fire risk is not hypothetical here. San Diego County saw two significant BESS fires in 2024, with one burning for weeks. Thermal runaway remains a recognized hazard of lithium-ion batteries, with potential for fire, toxic gas release, and re-ignition. Using the industry-standard EPRI incident rate, a BESS the size of **Starlight carries an estimated 16% annual probability of an incident — compounding to roughly 99.5% over a 30-year operating life.** That risk is magnified by where the project would sit: the Thorn Fire, one of 3 fires that caused evacuations in the area in the last few months, grew to nearly 700 acres in under two hours. Boulevard has experienced three significant wildfires in the last 90 days, each prompting evacuation orders and underscoring how quickly wildfire moves through the area's limited road network. *Starlight would place an 868-MWh BESS directly into that landscape.*

The community's water comes from the ground beneath it. Surrounding residents rely entirely on private wells, with no municipal backup if that water is compromised. A major BESS fire carries the risk of contaminated firewater runoff or smoke-plume material reaching the ground. Residents aren't claiming that contamination is inevitable, only that the risk is real

enough to warrant testing. They're asking the County to require a comprehensive pre-construction groundwater and well baseline, since once construction begins, a true baseline can never be recreated.

Residents' primary request: vote no. If the Board approves Starlight regardless, residents are asking for five conditions:

- **Independent, scientifically sound plume analysis** of potential BESS-fire emissions using appropriate atmospheric-dispersion modeling and conservative, scientifically supported toxic-emission assumptions.
- **Protect groundwater:** baseline testing before construction, monitoring during construction, annual testing for participating wells within three miles thereafter, and a plan to remedy any wells found to be impacted.
- **Recalculate construction-water impacts.** The water source has changed since the Planning Commission voted on it. Require updated traffic, air-quality, and greenhouse-gas analyses using the actual source and haul distance before the Board votes.
- **Maximize separation** between battery arrays and property lines, including moving Phase 2 batteries to the furthest feasible southern location.
- **Full funding of the \$7 million Community Impact Fund before Phase 1 begins** — since impacts (traffic, real estate disclosures, dust, noise, visual and character change) start on Day One, not Phase 2. The fund would amount to barely 1% of the lifetime gross revenue of the project.

These are safeguards in case of approval. Not an endorsement of the project.

Starlight is the wrong project for this location.

About No Starlight Solar: [NoStarlightSolar.com](https://www.nostarlightsolar.com) is a community-based effort advocating for responsible renewable-energy siting in Boulevard, California. The group supports the clean energy transition while opposing the proposed Starlight Solar and battery storage project on public safety, water, and rural-character grounds.