

Long Beach petroleum engineer hired to advise Los Angeles on fracking, natural gas drilling

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Mayor Eric Garcetti announced Monday a Long Beach petroleum engineer has been chosen to keep a closer watch over natural gas drilling and other fossil fuel extraction activity in Los Angeles.

Uduak-Joe Ntuk will advise the mayor, City Council and other city leaders on petroleum and natural gas-related issues, and lead the city's Office of Petroleum and Natural Gas Administration and Safety, which will operate under the Board of Public Works.

Garcetti said Ntuk, who tentatively set to begin Oct. 3, will "work with our residents, industry and regulators to help manage oil and gas activities in our neighborhoods, and play a role in steering L.A. toward a cleaner, more sustainable future."

Ntuk will assume a city role that has not been officially filled since the 1980s, according to Garcetti's office.

The Los Angeles City Council voted in February to hire a petroleum administrator amid Southern California Gas Co.'s attempts at capping a months-long gas leak at the Aliso Canyon natural gas storage facility near Porter Ranch and Chatsworth.

"Today's hiring of the city's first petroleum administrator in decades is a victory for the health and safety of families across Los Angeles," City Council President Herb J. Wesson said. "I'm proud to share this accomplishment with members of my community who partnered with me to make this vision a reality."

Residents in South Los Angeles and other areas have also complained in recent years about urban oil fields, saying noxious fumes and frequent trips of oil- or gas-hauling trucks place surrounding communities at risk.

For some council members, the selection of a petroleum administrator could mean potential movement on a plan to ban fracking in Los Angeles that was stalled after city staffers said they did not have the expertise necessary to draw up an ordinance.

One of the more immediate tasks to be undertaken by Ntuk and his office will be to negotiate renewals of expired franchise agreements with oil and natural gas pipeline companies, such as Southern California Gas Co., that pay fees to operate within Los Angeles.

Ntuk, a petroleum engineer associate for Long Beach, previously worked for Chevron and taught part-time at Cal State Long Beach. He earned a master's of science in petroleum engineering from USC.