

# Fracking not likely to cause problems here, state officials say

**David Sneed, San Luis Obispo Tribune, 5-7-13**

Several state officials tried to assure the public Monday that the chance of fracking causing environmental problems in California is much less likely than other parts of the country.

California's recoverable oil deposits occur in the Monterey shale rock formations that are 10,000 feet deep and contain little natural gas, said Grant Himebaugh with the Regional Water Quality Control Board. The state also has stricter environmental regulations and a Legislature that has introduced 15 bills this year to further increase regulations.

Problems seen in other parts of the country associated with fracking include groundwater contamination and natural gas getting into household plumbing so that water coming out of the spigot can be lit on fire.

More than 100 interested people packed the San Luis Obispo Library community room Monday evening to hear a two-hour panel discussion in San Luis Obispo about the controversial practice of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking.

The fracking procedure involves injecting water and chemicals under high pressure into oil-bearing deposits deep in the Earth in order to crack the rock and release oil and natural gas. The practice has become much more common in the past decade or so in various parts of the country, said Tim Kustic, director of the state Division of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources.

Although fracking has not been proposed in San Luis Obispo County, it is used extensively in Kern County on two oil fields where almost all of the state's 700 fracked wells are located, Kustic said. The technique has been used for about 50 years in the state.

David Chipping, emeritus geology professor of Cal Poly, said that, while fracking in the state has been done safely, there are still environmental concerns associated with it. These include the disposal of briny water that is pumped out with the oil, volatile fumes that can be released and potential zoning conflicts.

"It seems very difficult to zone against oil development in a given area," he said.

It is not clear how much authority local governments such as counties have to limit or prohibit fracking, said County Supervisor Bruce Gibson in an interview. Oil companies must get a permit to drill an oil well but once the permit is granted it is largely up to the state to regulate whether activities such as fracking take place.

Gibson said he would argue that counties should have the authority to place conditions on a well drilling permit that would regulate fracking.

According to the state, California produced more than 197.5 million barrels of oil in 2012 from more than 200 oil fields in 15 counties.

The event was sponsored by the League of Women Voters of San Luis Obispo County and moderated by Neil Havlik, retired natural resources manager for San Luis Obispo.