

Geology Experts Confirm Fracking Risks

Michelle Bednash, Santa Barbara Independent, 10-29-14

Unfortunately, if you repeat a lie often enough, it begins to seem like the truth. One such oft-repeated myth, propagated with the help of millions of dollars of outside oil money, is that “there is no risk of fracking” in Santa Barbara County so we don’t need Measure P to protect us.

The reality, however, is that some of the most experienced local geology experts, many of whom have worked for oil companies and taught and researched in the field of geology for decades, confirm that Santa Barbara County is very much at risk, and we absolutely need Measure P to protect the area from a massive increase in under-regulated unconventional oil extraction, a boom that is already beginning to take shape and poses an existential threat to the local environment.

“I spent 40 years in higher education and sent many students off to good, challenging jobs in the oil industry. Two of my students became presidents of oil companies. I myself did consulting work for oil companies in the past, both for major and local ones,” said Professor Emeritus Bruce Luyendyk, the former Chair of the Department of Earth Science at UCSB. “The problem is that all the easy oil, the low hanging fruit, is long gone. Extraordinary measures are needed to expand production here. Oil is locked up in tight rocks. To get the oil out, risky techniques like cyclic steam injection and even horizontal fracking will be needed. Given the latest estimates, I foresee uncontrolled industrial havoc in our county. We need Measure P to forestall this.”

Other geologists confirmed the profound risks to our water supply if we allow this massive expansion in high-intensity production. “Why should we risk the safety of our water supply just to rush the supply of our local oil to the global market place?” says Ken C. Macdonald, professor emeritus, UCSB Department of Earth Science, “We should keep our oil supply in the ground until we, locally, really need it, and then extract it only if the technology has advanced to the point where there is no threat to our drinking water.”

Rachel M. Haymon, professor emeritus, UCSB Department of Earth Science agrees with her colleagues. “Clean water is our most precious resource. We have a surplus of petroleum at this time, which is why oil prices are dropping. Meanwhile, water availability and quality should be our chief concern, and fracking is potentially a major and unmitigatable threat to our ground water.”

Both the California Department of Oil and Gas (DOGGR) and Santa Barbara County Energy staff have confirmed that there has been fracking in Santa Barbara County. There is currently fracking south of us in Ventura, west of us in the channel, and east of us in Kern County. Geologists point out that the formations of our county are not significantly different from those in these areas surrounding us. There is also a significant increase in high-intensity steam injection operations in Santa Barbara County and surrounding areas.

Misleading claims that there is no fracking risk originated after the onset of the campaign to qualify Measure P in April. Prior to that, the argument was that fracking is a safe and long-term practice that should be expanded. On March 11, 2014, Lanny Ebenstein wrote in the *Santa Barbara News-Press*, “Tupper Hull, vice president of the Western States Petroleum Association, strongly favors the expansion of fracking, including in California ... It should be emphasized that fracking is not a new technology — it has been used for more than 60 years. What is new is extended reach horizontal drilling, which allows dozens of fracture points along the horizontal portion of the well.”

What’s more, regardless of whether the specific technique is fracking, acidizing, or steam injection, the problems of water use, water contamination, air emissions, health impacts, and climate change concerns remain the same.

Geology professors Luyendyk, Macdonald, and Haymon join many other teachers and professors; elected officials at the state, county, and city level; community land use planning organizations across the county; health officials and water experts strongly endorsing Measure P. Vote “yes” on Measure P. It’s not worth the risk.