

County Planning Commission to consider allowing acid in red-tagged South County oil well

Sara Rubin, Monterey County Weekly, 4-23-15

Oil companies first drilled Bradley Minerals Wells numbered 1-2 and 2-2 on South County grazing land in 1985. They have operated the wells intermittently since.

Denver-based Venoco used hydraulic fracturing and acidization in these wells to help underground oil reserves flow in 2008, according to county records. After coming up empty, Venoco transferred the wells to Bakersfield-based Trio Petroleum.

County Code Enforcement issued a stop-work order because Trio was relying on Venoco's expired permit. Trio came to the County Planning Commission last July seeking new permits for Well 2-2.

The Planning Commission asked Trio to return with more rigorous environmental analysis, which the company will do April 29. In environmental documents, Trio indicates the proposed phase would last up to one year. If it gathers good intel, Trio will apply for a full production permit, hoping to produce up to 150 barrels a day. "No well stimulation (including steam injection or hydraulic fracturing) is proposed," Trio writes.

The definition of well stimulation – boosting oil production – includes acid, when injected at high concentrations. Trio proposes using acid for maintenance, to dissolve calcium and other build-up.

But some critics contend "maintenance" is a cover: "Oil operators are in many instances re-labeling acidization for production purposes as 'well maintenance,' thereby evading disclosure requirements," attorney Davis Hobstetter wrote in a letter for nonprofit Center for Biological Diversity.

On March 17, the county supervisors voted 3-2 against a temporary moratorium on "well stimulation" methods. Their discussion centered on hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, not acid.

With no pending fracking applications in Monterey County, the supervisors reasoned, there was no urgent need to act. "We have to find an immediate threat," Supervisor John Phillips said. "There is no fracking, and no application for [fracking]."