

Battle over fracking in Monterey County has officially begun.

David Schmalz, The Monterey County Weekly, 2-25-16

About a dozen activists gathered in front of the Monterey County courthouse Feb. 23 to announce a proposed ballot measure that would ban, among other things, hydraulic fracturing—commonly known as fracking—within the county.

The gathering was led by Robert Frischmuth, a retired chemical engineer who spent most of his career in the fossil fuel industry. He laid out the proposal's basic tenets: Aside from a ban on fracking, it would phase out wastewater injection wells, and ban new oil and gas wells. Frischmuth also emphasized that the current method of extraction being used in the county, called cyclic steam injection, would not be banned in the proposed measure.

Those tenets were boiled down from the 20 pages in the proposed measure's language, which was filed with the county earlier that day. In order to get on the ballot in November, the activists – part of a coalition called Protect Monterey County – will need to collect about 7,400 signatures. If the measure gets on the ballot, it will need a simple majority vote to pass.

The move to ban fracking locally has been years in the making. In 2014, activists garnered over 1,800 signatures in favor of a fracking moratorium within the county, and the county Planning Commission agreed, voting 7-0 in favor of a moratorium. About a year later, in March 2015, the County Board of Supervisors rejected that moratorium.

Chief among the activists' concerns is the potential contamination of Salinas Valley aquifers. Howard Franklin, a hydrogeologist with the County Water Resources Agency, says annual tests near the San Ardo oil fields show existing operations have not polluted nearby water.

The oil industry has already geared up for the fight, running pro-oil television ads over the last month.

“California has the strictest environmental regulations in the world,” says Karen Hanretty, communications director for Californians for Energy Independence. “This is another scare tactic.”