

Alameda County first in Bay Area to ban fracking

Denis Cuff, Bay Area News Group, 7-20-16

OAKLAND -- Alameda County on Tuesday became the first Bay Area county to ban fracking.

A coalition of environmental groups had worked for more than two years to persuade county leaders to ban fracking and other high intensity oil recovery practices to protect against pollution of local groundwater. The Board of Supervisors approved the ban 5-0.

Fracking uses pressurized water and chemicals to fracture tight underground formations to get at petroleum.

While no companies frack in Alameda County, groups such as Food and Water Watch, the Sierra Club and others say they want to prevent the practice from taking hold in Livermore Valley where it could threaten wine grape vineyards and tourism.

About 20 people waited for more than four hours through a Board of Supervisors meeting Tuesday to voice their support for a ban.

"It's the only way to protect our environment from the destructive effects of fracking" said Kiana Tsao of the Sierra Club. "Alameda County is a community, not just a commodity for the oil industry."

Some property owners and representatives of drilling rights owners oppose a ban, arguing a ban amounts to an illegal taking of their property rights.

The only oil driller in Alameda County -- E&B Natural Resources in Livermore -- has said it could live with the proposed ban after it was modified earlier this year to soften sections the company said could disrupt its 30-barrel-a-day operation.

Amy Roth, a spokeswoman for E&B, said Tuesday her company has not fracked at the site.

Alameda County's ordinance is part of a grass-roots strategy by environmentalists to seek bans one county at a time after Gov. Jerry Brown said he opposes a statewide fracking ban in oil-rich California.

Environmentalists also are working on drawing up a ban in Santa Clara County.

Voters in Monterey County -- the state's fourth largest oil producing county -- will vote on a fracking ban on the November ballot.

Santa Cruz and San Benito counties already have fracking bans.