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## Now They're Fracking California's Oceans?

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Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water, California's coast faces a new threat. Oil companies are fracking the ocean floor just offshore -- and state and federal officials seem unconcerned or out of the loop about the danger to the Golden State's sensitive coastal waters.

On dry land, fracking has been an environmental menace for years from Pennsylvania to Texas to North Dakota. But Californians only recently discovered that oil and gas companies are fracking our state as well, blasting huge volumes of water mixed with toxic chemicals into the earth to release fossil fuels.

Now we've learned that oil companies are also fracking the ocean floor. This dangerous process is already happening in federal waters in the Santa Barbara Channel, where an infamous 1969 oil spill polluted our ocean and beaches with millions of gallons of oil, and federal officials recently approved a new fracking project.

Fracking along California's coast is a deeply troubling prospect, especially when you start thinking about all the whales, turtles, fish and other marine life that call these waters home.

That's why I just sent a notice to the federal government that offshore fracking in California is violating a key national environmental law

that first requires an analysis of risks to human health and the environment.

The letter asks the government to halt hydraulic fracturing off the California coast until, at least, that environmental review is done.

Despite the federal shutdown, the government will continue some oil and gas operations, including processing development plans and applications for drilling permits -- and they should also devote some resources to taking a hard look at this incredibly dangerous threat to our marine environment.

State waters are also involved. The oil industry has fracked at least 12 times in the past three years in state waters near Long Beach, according to industry documents and state records analyzed by our organization. Records also show that offshore fracking in California employs dangerous substances, including 2-Butoxyethanol and other cancer-causing chemicals.

The best way to protect our fragile coastal environment is to ban this inherently dangerous process. But at a minimum, we need an immediate moratorium on ocean fracking to give state and federal regulators a chance to get their act together.

Despite the recent passage of a flawed fracking bill in the state legislature, California oil and gas officials still don't yet track fracking

-- onshore or offshore -- in spite of its links to water and air pollution in other states. And offshore fracking has surprised the California Coastal Commission, which recently launched an investigation into the practice.

The federal agencies that oversee oil production are relying on outdated environmental analyses that don't consider dangerous new fracking techniques. Federal officials aren't even sure how often fracking has happened in California's coastal waters.

All of the risks of oil drilling, including oil spills and greenhouse gas pollution, are exacerbated by fracking. This is because the new technology makes it possible to get oil that would otherwise stay put, so it means more drilling and more pollution.

Fracking raises a host of environmental concerns, from toxic spills and air and water pollution to the release of large quantities of methane, a dangerously potent greenhouse gas.

Fracking fluid can include more than 600 different chemicals, including substances that cause cancer and other health problems in humans and wildlife. In the water, fracking fluid is just dumped into the ocean or transported back to shore and injected underground, where it can contaminate groundwater.

Aging offshore wells may make fracking especially dangerous in California's coastal waters, where there's been a decades-old moratorium on new leasing. Shooting highly pressurized fluid down older wells could increase the risk of well failure and the release of oil and chemical-laced fracking fluid into the ocean.

Imagine the havoc these dangerous chemicals could cause in the wildlife-rich Santa Barbara Channel, which hosts the world's densest summer congregation of blue whales.

One thing is crystal clear: Regulators know far too little about offshore fracking. That's why, at a minimum, we need a time-out on this dangerous practice.

A de-facto fracking moratorium is already in place on some federally managed onshore land in California. The Bureau of Land Management recently announced -- following a lawsuit -- the launch of an environmental analysis and an independent scientific review of fracking's risks in our state. That process has halted fracking on thousands of acres of California public land.

We need a similar "time out" on offshore fracking. There's just too much we don't know -- and far too much at stake.