



Protesters demand halt to dumping of toxic oil-drilling waste.

By Dave Rice

A group of protesters organized by environmental organizations SanDiego350 and the Center for Biological Diversity, some donning mock hazmat suits, gathered Wednesday morning outside the Catamaran Resort on Mission Bay. Inside, the California Coastal Commission was hosting a meeting to consider a massive expansion plan for a section of Interstate 5 running through North County, among other issues.

The protesters, however, were concerned with a different issue: a shift from conventional oil drilling to the practice of hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking,” off the California coast.

“We knew that there were offshore platforms off Santa Barbara and Long Beach that have been grandfathered in for a long time,” says activist Peg Mitchell. “What no one realized was that, late last year, they began drilling unconventionally, using the fracking process which involves injecting tons of fresh water

mixed with highly toxic chemicals into wells.”

Environmentalists say that the waste water and chemicals from drilling is being released directly into the ocean, putting a wide swath of marine species at risk. They’re demanding that the Coastal Commission, which holds authority over the handful of existing rigs (a moratorium on new drilling platforms off the state’s coast has been in place since 1969), take action to prohibit fracking in coastal waters.

“These are old, archaic rigs that have very new practices using high pressures, new technologies. These things really aren’t built to handle the pressure involved in fracking,” says Ash Lauth, a Center campaign organizer. Because of the moratorium, oil companies have labored on with equipment originally installed in the 1950s and 1960s, rather than abandon their wells.

“Every single time that we frack in the ocean, we threaten the marine ecosystem and threaten life along California’s coast,” continues Lauth. “We know that the only way to protect ourselves is to ban the practice going forward.”

On Tuesday, the Center released polling data finding that a majority 55 percent of Californians support an offshore fracking ban. An even larger share, 65 percent, favor restrictions that would prevent fracking chemicals from being dumped into the ocean after use if the practice continues.