



Group says new fracking rules let Big Oil hide toxic chemical use

by Dan Bacher

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Proposed new regulations governing fracking and other dangerous oil well stimulation techniques in California would “do little” to protect the state’s air, water and public health, according to the Center for Biological Diversity.

The Center said Draft rules unveiled on June 17 by Governor Jerry Brown’s Division of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources, authorized under Fran Pavley’s Senate Bill 4, also allow regulators to rubber-stamp multiple fracks and include a “well maintenance” loophole permitting oil companies to conceal dangerous chemical use.

“Governor Brown’s weak fracking rules are a huge gift to oil companies using dangerous chemicals in California communities,” said Hollin Kretzmann of the Center for Biological Diversity. “State officials are simply refusing to protect people from fracking pollution or even ensure we know what hazardous substances are used in our neighborhoods. That’s why cities and counties are moving to safeguard their residents by halting fracking and other risky extraction methods.”

If you have any doubts that these weak regulations are a “huge gift to oil companies,” just

ask Catherine Reheis-Boyd, the President of the Western States Petroleum Association and former chair of the Marine Life Protection Act Initiative Blue Ribbon Task Force for the South Coast, who praised the governor’s signing of Senate Bill 4 for creating the “environmental” platform to expand fracking in California. (<http://www.wspsa.org/...>)

“With the signing of Senate Bill 4, California has the toughest regulations of hydraulic fracturing and other energy production technologies in the country,” said Reheis-Boyd. “While SB 4’s requirements went significantly farther than the petroleum industry felt was necessary, we now have an environmental platform on which California can look toward the opportunity to responsibly develop the enormous potential energy resource contained in the Monterey Shale formation.”

The proposed regulations would go into effect Jan. 1, 2015, replacing temporary fracking rules now in place. Among the draft regulations’ biggest flaws:

- No protection for the air and climate: “The state’s draft regulations don’t require operators to capture methane, a potent greenhouse gas,” the Center stated. “They don’t protect people living near fracked wells from air pollutants that cause cancer and respiratory illness.

A recent Center analysis found that oil companies used more than 45 million pounds of dangerous 'air toxic' chemicals in fracking, acidizing and gravel packing over the past year in Los Angeles and Orange counties."

- "Well-maintenance" loophole continues to let companies avoid disclosure: "The draft regulations allow companies to avoid disclosing dangerous chemical use to the public by claiming to be using the fracking or acidizing chemicals for "well maintenance" purposes," the Center said.

- Rubber-stamp approval for multiple fracking events: "The regulations' 'single project authorization' provision might be interpreted by oil officials as allowing them to approve many applications with one rubber-stamp approval," the group said.

- Weak water protection: "Testing to collect baseline water quality data and uncover fracking pollution will only be done at the request of people living within 1,500 feet of a fracked well. An apartment building would only receive one notice for all its tenants."

- Rules unlikely to be enforced: "A Center analysis found more than 100 violations of current fracking disclosure requirements in the past several months, making it likely that such violations by state oil officials and oil operators will continue," the group concluded.

"Nearly a third of California's wells are fracked, according to a recent statement from the oil industry," Kretzmann said. "Oil companies have also fracked hundreds of wells off California's coast, and the industry has federal permission to annually dump more than

9 billion gallons of wastewater, including fracking fluid, directly into the waters of the Santa Barbara Channel."

In one of the most blatant conflicts of interests in modern California history, Catherine Reheis-Boyd, the President of the Western States Petroleum Association (WSPA), chaired the MLPA Initiative Blue Ribbon Task Force for the South Coast while the oil industry was fracking in the waters of the Santa Barbara Channel. She also served on the task forces for the Central Coast, North Central Coast and North Coast – and currently sits on a federal marine protected areas panel. (<http://intercontinentalcry.org/...>)

It is no surprise that the alleged "marine protected areas" developed under the "leadership" of Reheis-Boyd and other corporate operatives and political appointees fail to protect the ocean from pollution, fracking, offshore oil drilling, military testing, corporate aquaculture and all human impacts on the ocean other than sustainable fishing and gathering.

A Freedom of Information Act and Associated Press investigation last year revealed that Southern California marine waters were fracked at least 203 times in the past 20 years. (<http://www.usatoday.com/...>)

Much of the fracking took place while the Western States Petroleum Association president was overseeing the creation of the oil industry-friendly "marine protected areas" in a privately-funded "initiative," a process that state officials, the corporate media and corporate "environmental" NGOs touted as "open, transparent and inclusive" when it was anything but.

Governor Jerry Brown's signing of the green light to fracking bill that authorized the weak new regulations, as well as the recent defeat of a fracking moratorium bill on the State Senate Floor, are the result of the inordinate amount of the power and influence that the oil industry wields in Sacramento. Brown signed the bill after receiving at least \$2,014,570.22 from fossil fuel interests since his race for Attorney General in 2006. (<http://www.bigoilbrown.org/...>)

A report released on April 1, 2014 by the ACCE Institute and Common Cause reveals that Big Oil has spent \$143.3 million on political candidates and campaigns – nearly \$10 million per year and more than any other corporate lobby – over the past fifteen years. (<http://www.commoncause.org/...>)

But Big Oil exerts its influence not just by making campaign contributions, but also by lobbying legislators at the State Capitol. The Western States Petroleum Association, the most powerful corporate lobbying group in Sacramento, spent \$123.6 million to lobby elected officials in California from 1999 through 2013. This was an increase of over 400 percent since the 1999-2000 legislative session, when the industry spent \$4.8 million.

In response to fracking's spread, Los Angeles, Beverly Hills and other California communities have begun moving forward with local measures that would halt fracking and other dangerous extraction techniques. Conservation groups, consumer organizations, American Indian Tribal activists and environmental justice advocates are challenging Governor Brown to ban these dangerous oil and gas activities in California.