

## Anti-fracking protesters rally outside Long Beach workshop



Andrea Weber uses a bullhorn as she leads a group into a chant as anti-fracking activists wear hazmat suits to protest a state-run “aquifer exemption” workshop that they say will enable drillers to dump waste into water in Long Beach CA. Tuesday March 24, 2015. (Thomas R. Cordova-Daily Breeze/Press-Telegram)

By Andrew Edwards,  
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LONG BEACH >> The question of how the state’s petroleum companies should dispose of wastewater that comes from the

ground mixed with newly pumped crude oil attracted a gathering of anti-fracking protesters in Long Beach on Tuesday.

The meeting between regulators and industry figures was not technically focused on “fracking,” which is more properly known as hydraulic fracturing and involves the use of pressurized water and chemicals to break up rocks to access oil resources. Instead, it was described as a workshop to instruct oil companies on how to obtain permits to dispose of wastewater underground in what are known as injection wells.

The workshop was held after state regulators at the Division of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources promised federal regulators they would improve oversight of injection wells.

For environmentalists, concerns over fracking overlap with the disposal of wastewater: They believe both oil industry practices risk groundwater contamination.

“This is essentially a ‘Toxic Dumping for Dummies workshop,’” Ash Lauth, a campaigner for the Center for Biological Diversity, said at the protest site, where about 50 others joined her. “This is where state regulators teach oil companies how to exploit the law in order to continue dumping poison into our aquifers.”

The Center for Biological Diversity is an environmental group and part of Californians Against Fracking, which organized Tuesday’s rally, Lauth said.

An industry group spokesman said injection wells are heavily regulated, and the public doesn't need to worry.

"The suggestion that injection is taking place in drinking water is false," said Tupper Hull, spokesman for the Western States Petroleum Association.

Hull acknowledged the water obtained as a by-product of oil production is usually so full of salt and hydrocarbons that no one would want to drink it, but he also said some of the water is clean enough to irrigate Central Valley farmers' crops.

Earlier this month, state regulators announced 11 injection wells in Kern County and another in Tulare County would be shut down to safeguard groundwater supplies.

Officials also reported that there are more than 50,000 injection wells in California, and state regulators' efforts to assess any safety issues affecting drinking water is immediately focused on 176 wells near aquifers, according to the state Division of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources.

That action followed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's determination that California's regulation of injections wells has fallen short of what may be needed to protect drinking supplies. State regulators have promised to work with the EPA to improve oversight.

An Associated Press analysis published in February found state regulators allowed oil producers to inject wastewater into federally protected aquifers on more than 2,500 occasions.