

# THINK PROGRESS

## Climate

### Despite Historic Drought, California Used 70 Million Gallons Of Water For Fracking Last Year



In this Thursday, Oct. 30, 2014, file photo, houseboats float in the drought-lowered waters of Oroville Lake near Oroville, Calif.

CREDIT: AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli, File

by Katie Valentine - Apr 6, 2015

Even in the midst of its historic, ongoing drought, California used millions of gallons of water for hydraulic fracturing last year, according to state officials.

The state used nearly 70 million gallons of water to frack for oil and gas in 2014, Reuters

reported last week. That amount is actually less than the 100 million gallons officials previously estimated the state uses for fracking operations every year.

Steven Bohlen, California's oil and gas supervisor, noted to Reuters that not all water used for fracking operations is freshwater: some of it is produced water, which rises to the sur-

face during the fracking process and can't be used for drinking or irrigation. In all, Bohlen said, fracking uses the same amount of water as about 514 households each year.

But Patrick Sullivan, spokesperson for the Center for Biological Diversity and Californians Against Fracking, says that while this figure may be correct, using water for fracking isn't the same as using water for household tasks, like brushing teeth or washing dishes. That water is cycled back into the overall water supply, while water used for fracking is typically too contaminated to be used again for things like irrigation or drinking.

"It is water that most likely cannot be put back into the water cycle," he told Think-Progress. "It's water that is by and large gone for good."

Sullivan also said that he didn't think the figure included all forms of oil and gas development, including things like steam injection — a method commonly used in California oil production. Reuters reported last week that environmentalists estimate that the state's oil and gas industry uses 2 million gallons of fresh water a day for oil production.

At a time when California is enduring a historic, four-year drought, the state shouldn't be using its precious water resources to frack, Sullivan said. Last week, California Governor Jerry Brown issued an executive order that contained the state's first-ever mandatory restrictions on water use. The order requires the State Water Resources Control Board to reduce water use by 25 percent in the state's local water supply agencies over the next year.

The order also directs the state Department of Water Resources to lead an effort to replace 50 million square feet of lawns with drought-resistant landscaping, and requires that places like golf courses, cemeteries, and college campuses "immediately implement water efficiency measures."

The order does not, however, restrict the use of water for fracking in the state. That's something that California environmentalists weren't happy about.

"Governor Brown is forcing ordinary Californians to shoulder the burden of the drought by cutting their personal water use while giving the oil industry a continuing license to break the law and poison our water," Zack Malitz of environmental group Credo told Reuters last week. "Fracking and toxic injection wells may not be the largest uses of water in California, but they are undoubtedly some of the stupidest," he added.

Sullivan agrees.

"I know there are places in the Central Valley where the ground is literally sinking because so much groundwater is being pumped out," he said, alluding to a problem in the Valley that's been exacerbated by the drought. "It is inexcusable that we are continuing to use this precious water for fracking...we've got to protect our water supply in the state; we're running dry."

A ban or temporary moratorium in the state hasn't happened yet, but it has received some interest from state lawmakers. Last year, California assemblyman Marc Levine (D) pushed for a moratorium on fracking, saying that the state had to "decide what our most precious commodity is — water or oil?"

Sullivan is among those who want the state to stop fracking altogether. He's not just concerned about the industry's high use of water resources; he's also concerned about where the industry's wastewater ends up. In February, a San Francisco Chronicle story revealed that California regulators allowed oil companies to dispose of their wastewater in drinking and irrigation aquifers, letting the companies drill a total of 171 wastewater injection wells into these freshwater aquifers. According to the Center for Biological Diversity, a new draft "underground injection control" plan would allow the state to continue polluting these aquifers for another two years.