

HB-2623 - Relating to hydraulic fracturing; declaring an emergency.
Position: FAVORABLE
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

April 18, 2019

Dear Chairman Dembrow and Committee Members:

On behalf of Food & Water Watch's 67,000 members and supporters in Oregon, we urge a favorable report on HB-2623 which will place a moratorium on fracking in Oregon until 2030.

Food & Water Watch was the first national organization to call for an outright ban on fracking. Our members and supporters are active in campaigns to resist fracking and its impacts in communities around the country, and have succeeded in passing fracking bans in New York, Maryland, Florida, and hundreds of municipalities in other states.

We are up against much more than the oil and gas industry. Global financial institutions are betting hundreds of billions of dollars on new infrastructure to support the oil and gas industry's vision of maximizing oil and gas production. In light of climate science alone, this is short-sighted. As you know, fracking brings many risks to our public health, our local economies, and our environment. Recent research speaks to the public health threats posed by fracking to people living nearby.

- Researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and collaborating institutions published a study in August 2016 which analyzed responses to questionnaires received from more than 7,000 adult primary care patients in central and northern Pennsylvania, and found statistically significant associations between proximity to active fracking operations and various combinations of migraine headaches, chronic rhinosinusitis and fatigue symptoms.
- Another study from Johns Hopkins, published in July 2016, analyzed medical records of more than 35,000 asthma patients, ages five to 90 years old, and found a statistically significant association between proximity to active fracking operations and mild to severe asthma exacerbations.
- An earlier October 2015 study also led by researchers at the Johns Hopkins found that expectant mothers living near heavy fracking in Pennsylvania were significantly more likely to experience a high-risk pregnancy or give birth prematurely.
- Research in northeast Pennsylvania, released in July 2015, found a correlation between the density of fracking wells and the rate at which local residents were admitted to the hospital.
- And in June 2015, University of Maryland researchers published evidence that emissions from fracking in West Virginia and Pennsylvania were impacting air quality as far away as Baltimore and Washington DC.

Fracking also poses serious threats to drinking water. Briefly:

- Fracking perforates the subsurface, with around 10 wells per square mile, for miles around. The concrete and steel pipes — vertical pipelines — age and degrade. Fracking puts aquifers at risk for generations by creating these new pathways through which contaminants may flow over long periods of time— contaminants including the chemicals injected to drill the well, radioactive brines and methane and other hydrocarbon gases.
- Fracking generates toxic and even radioactive waste, the disposal of which causes earthquakes and additional drinking water problems.
- Fracking also leads to thousands of accidents, leaks and spills each year that threaten public health and safety and risk rivers, streams and shallow aquifers. Industry has been very successful in carving out loopholes to prevent data on the actual impacts after these spills from being known.
- Each fracked well consumes millions of gallons of water, competing with farmers for often increasingly scarce local water supplies.

In addition to public health and water quality issues, fracking has also caused a myriad of other problems:

- Fracking emits hazardous pollutants into the air above well-sites and other infrastructure, at the expense of local communities, families and farms.
- Fracking fragments forests and mars landscapes with new roads, new well sites and new pipelines and other infrastructure, with inevitable failures leading to methane leaks and even pipeline explosions.
- Fracking has turned homes into explosive hazards by contaminating water wells with methane and other harmful hydrocarbon gases, including volatile organic compounds such as benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylenes (BTEX).
- Finally, fracking threatens the climate on which we all depend by dumping carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere, and by locking in future climate pollution with each new infrastructure project. The message of climate science is clear: rather than drilling for more fossil fuels, we must maximize what we keep in the ground instead.

Fracking is simply indefensible, in light of the impacts on air, water and health in targeted communities. The surest way to protect Oregon from this threat is to pass HB 2623.

Sincerely,

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