

It's time for California to end risky fracking

By Michael Brune Special to The Bee

At the end of last year, Gov. Andrew Cuomo banned hydraulic fracturing in New York, citing the threat it poses to public health. His state's acting health commissioner put it this way: "The potential risks are too great. In fact, they are not even fully known."

Here in California, however, fracking is already happening and is poised to spread more widely. A report released last month from the California Council on Science and Technology showed that as many as 175 new fracking wells are drilled in the state every month, even though most residents are against it.

Why would the Golden State allow fracking after New York found the practice – already linked to water contamination and earthquakes in Colorado, Oklahoma and Pennsylvania – too risky?

On Saturday, thousands of people from every corner of the state – including the communities being hit hardest by fracking, such as Kern County – will take to the streets of Oakland in a March for Climate Leadership. We will call on the governor to protect all Californians by curtailing a practice that directly threatens our water, our health and our communities.

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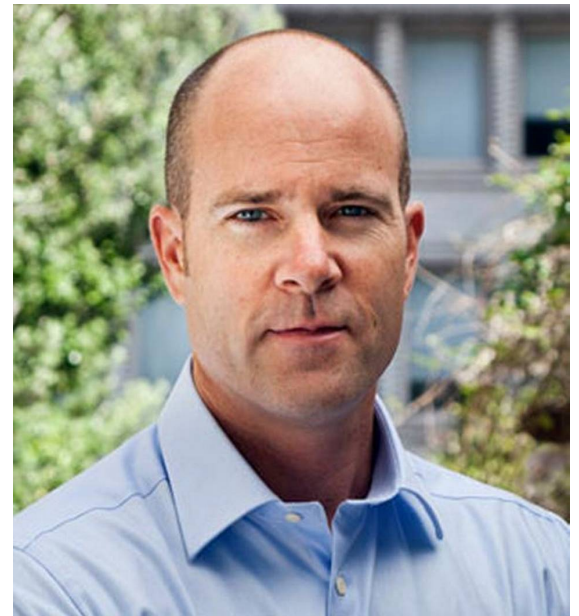
One out of every seven Californians lives within a mile of an oil or gas well. If all the potential risks of fracking are "not even fully known," then perhaps we should consider what we do know about fracking.

First, we know that it's risky. Even fracking's supporters (the oil and gas industries and anyone else who stands to profit from it) use words such as "acceptable," "minimal" and "mitigating" when discussing the risks. Not even fracking's biggest boosters pretend there are no dangers. The truth is that we won't know the full price of expanding fracking until after it's too late. If your drinking water supply is contaminated, it's small solace that the risk of it happening was minimal.

Second, we know that more oil and gas fracking means more pollution. That means more of the air pollution that has already made the San Joaquin Valley the most dangerous place in America to breathe. Why sabotage our progress on clean air by promoting a huge new source of pollution?

Third, and most importantly, scientists know that we need to leave as many fossil fuels in the ground as possible. To avert catastrophic global warming, they say, more than 80 percent of known fossil fuel reserves must stay untouched. This reality must be factored into every energy decision. And if our political leaders cannot accept this reality in California, an international leader on climate, can we really expect much progress globally?

Largely thanks to Gov. Jerry Brown, California boasts the most ambitious state targets in the nation for cutting climate



pollution. That's a logical and necessary response to the threat of global warming, and a reflection of California's desire to show international leadership.

By that same logic, though, we should also be looking for every opportunity not to increase the oil and gas production that is creating that pollution. Finding reasons to continue and even to expand fracking in our state is exactly the opposite of what we should be doing. Why work to solve the problem of climate change with one hand, and then make it worse with the other?

Brown has a singular leadership opportunity to put a stop to this logical fallacy by refusing to give in to the fossil fuel lobby and simply saying, "No more."

The good news is that California has superior energy options that don't require fracking. We have excellent renewable energy resources and strong goals. We're the home of Tesla, Sungevity, Solar City, Sunrun, and SunPower – companies creating the technology, financing and infrastructure for our clean energy future. Within decades, California's economy can and should be powered with 100 percent clean, renewable energy, replacing our oil-guzzling transportation infrastructure with clean-powered electric vehicles and high-speed rail.

It's time for California to follow New York's lead and kick fracking to the curb.

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