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## Cracking Down on Fracking in California— Is it The Smart Thing to Do?

BY KERRY JACKSON

Jerry Brown left office in January as one of the most popular governors in California history. He also left successor Gavin Newsom with a few headaches. Among the more prominent unresolved issues are the high-speed rail project, the housing and homeless crises, and runaway public-employee pension obligations.

And then there's hydraulic fracturing. It's the much-maligned method of harvesting fossil fuels by injecting liquids and other materials under high pressure into rock formations, typically shale.

Despite activist pressure, Brown wasn't inclined to ban hydraulic fracturing – more generally known as fracking – though he did sign legislation requiring energy companies to disclose all the chemicals used in the process. That left Newsom, whose platform included a fracking ban, with a decision.

However, “the public hasn't heard from Newsom on the issue as he has laid out his initial priorities,” CALmatters recently reported. Neither has his staff answered questions regarding his current position.

Hostility toward fracking in California is, not surprisingly, common. The state has arguably the [strictest fracking regulations](#) in the country. Several cities and counties have already shut down the practice.

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The antipathy is largely based on claims that fracking taints underground aquifers that provide drinking water, fouls the air, speeds climate change because it encourages greater production of cheap fossil fuels, and causes earthquakes.

Environmental activists have a history of exaggerating the risks of hydrocarbon energy production, and they've been especially loose with the facts about fracking. Thanks to a noisy and relentless disinformation campaign, much of the public is convinced fracking should be outlawed.

Contaminated water supplies are, admittedly, a chilling prospect. But don't blame fracking for something it's not responsible for. Aquifers that provide drinking water are typically only a few hundred feet underground while fracking takes place thousands of feet below the surface. For fracking fluids to contaminate water, they would have to travel upward against gravity. A study from Germany, one of more than two dozen that [debunk the water threat](#), "found that the injected fluids did not move upward into layers carrying drinking water."

Fracking doesn't contribute to air pollution or hasten climate change, either. Research from Richard Muller, a University of California, Berkeley, physics professor, and Elizabeth Muller, co-founder and executive director of Berkeley Earth, shows that [fracking reduces levels](#) of "a deadly pollution known as PM2.5 that is currently killing over three million people each year, primarily in the developing world" since fracking allows natural gas to displace coal as an energy source.

Fracking also [reduces](#) sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide, particularly harmful pollutants produced by fossil fuel combustion.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says "the rapid deployment of hydraulic fracturing" has "allowed for a more extensive switching of power and heat production from coal to gas," which "[is an important reason for a reduction](#)" of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S.

While there is a connection to seismic activity, it's not enough to warrant the fear that's been generated. The U.S. Geological Survey says "[only 1-2 percent](#) of the earthquakes can be linked" to fracking. The remainder of "induced" earthquakes were caused by the disposal of wastewater, which is produced at all oil wells. The earthquake risk, therefore, is hardly increased by fracking. Furthermore, while one "induced" earthquake registered a 5.8 magnitude in Oklahoma in 2016, the British Geological Survey says, "hydraulic fracturing is generally accompanied by microseismicity (very small earthquakes that are too small to be felt)."

It should also be noted that fracking protects unspoiled land. Most operations are on sites that have "[already been exposed](#) to a great deal of environmental wear and tear" from conventional extraction methods, says Hoover Institution fellow Richard Epstein, therefore reducing the need for "fresh explorations in pristine areas."

A few years ago, a University of Southern California study projected 2.5 million new jobs would be created by 2020 simply by taking advantage of the energy stored in the Monterey shale formation in the central part of the state. More than \$24 billion in additional tax revenue would be generated over the same period.

Even as the state has fallen from [second in the country](#) to [seventh in oil production](#), its energy sector remains an economic dynamo. A Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation study said the oil and gas industry "generates more than [\\$148 billion](#) in direct economic activity" each year. Why cripple it with a fracking ban? It would be utterly counterproductive.

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