

# *NEWS RELEASE*

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## **Santa Barbara Channelkeeper Calls for Action to Protect Public Health from Fracking Contamination**

February 18, 2015 (VENTURA, CA) — On Friday, Santa Barbara Channelkeeper, a non-profit organization that works to protect and restore the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds, petitioned two government agencies - the Ventura County Environmental Health Division (VCHD) and the California Division of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources (DOGGR) - to take action to protect public health and the environment from contamination emanating from oil fields along the north coast of Ventura County. Citing a recent scientific study, Channelkeeper highlights findings that indicate fracking and enhanced recovery activities by nearby oil producers may be contaminating coastal streams and beaches.

In October 2014, the consulting firm Blue Tomorrow and Dr. Arturo Keller of the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB) released a study that examined impacts of hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) and oil production operations in five coastal watersheds in northern Ventura County.<sup>1</sup> The study collected and analyzed samples of stormwater discharges and stream flows in five coastal canyons and identified potential threats to public health from exposure to such discharges. The canyons in question drain nearby popular swimming and surfing beaches including Solimar Beach, Faria County Beach, and the popular family surfing destination known as “Mondo’s” Beach.

Of particular concern were findings that runoff from some of the streams was found to contain concentrations of dissolved metals such as arsenic, as well as organic compounds that pose a risk of toxicity to humans through skin exposure. Storm flows in Amphitheater and Line Canyons were found to be up to 44 times greater than minimum levels expected to be safe for human contact.

Most alarmingly, the study concluded that fracking and waste disposal through well injection may be directly linked to chronic contamination of one particular stream, Line Canyon, which flows year-round to Solimar Beach. The study’s authors highlighted the year-round flows in Line Canyon as highly unusual when compared to neighboring streams along the South Coast that have remained consistently dry through the drought. According to Blue Tomorrow and Dr. Keller:

The persistent Line Canyon base flow exhibits characteristics of a deep ground water source, and potentially originates from thousands of feet deep. The base flow may originate from or be mixed with produced water

that is being injected into the oil fields as part of the water flooding enhanced oil recovery projects. Fractures and faults in the study watersheds may be providing pathways for deep groundwater or injected water that surfaces as a spring and sustains this base flow. DRO, RRO [diesel and residual range organics], and PAHs [polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons] were detected in the base flow, and the volume of produced water and the hazardous chemicals that are being injected into deep geologic formations pose a potential risk of deep springs being hydraulically connected to the petroleum source formations and returning these pollutants to the surface.

“These are very significant findings,” said Ben Pitterle, Marine and Watershed Program Director for Santa Barbara Channelkeeper, “because they link fracking and wastewater injection occurring locally with measureable and harmful pollution impacting our watersheds and ocean. It’s surprising that little was said or done about the results when the study was released late last year.”

According to the study, fracking has been performed on at least three wells in the study area, and roughly 380 million gallons of wastewater was injected into the oil fields in 2013 alone as part of oil recovery operations. Channelkeeper and others have long been critical of regional oil field operations causing sediment- and contaminant-laden storm runoff to flow into rivers and creeks. In 2012, the Environmental Defense Center filed a lawsuit against the Line Canyon oil producer, Vintage Production California LLC, for alleged violations of the Clean Water Act. The study is a one element of the settlement agreement resulting from that lawsuit.

Channelkeeper has petitioned state and county agencies to heed the study’s recommendations by installing signage to warn the public to stay out of the water where the contaminated creeks flow to the beach. Channelkeeper also called for a moratorium on further fracking and injection activities in the area until the appropriate government agencies can conduct tracer tests to verify that operations aren’t polluting the water.

“Every day that goes by is another opportunity for someone to come into contact with this harmful pollution,” said Pitterle. “Our government has the mandatory duty and authority to make sure these types of oil production activities don’t endanger public health, and we’re simply asking them to do their job.”

Channelkeeper is awaiting a response from state and local agencies. In the meantime, they hope that as word spreads about the findings, swimmers and surfers will stay away from the contaminated outfalls.

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<sup>1</sup> Dragos, A., E Hopkins, and A. Keller. Northern Ventura County Coastal Watershed Project. Blue Tomorrow. <http://blue-tomorrow.com/projects/>

Santa Barbara Channelkeeper's mission is to protect and restore the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds through science-based advocacy, education, field work and enforcement. To learn more about Channelkeeper, visit [www.sbck.org](http://www.sbck.org)