

100+ Maryland businesses call for fracking moratorium

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Reuters / Andrew Cullen

More than 100 businesses in western Maryland have come out in support of a bill that would establish a moratorium on oil and gas exploration via hydraulic fracturing, citing concerns over pollution, health and tourism consequences.

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Lawmakers in Maryland are currently considering bills that would either place an eight-year moratorium on fracking or ban the practice completely, much like New York did late last year.

However, state Gov. Larry Hogan believes the time is right to allow the practice – which involves blasting highly pressurized water, sand and other chemicals into layers of rock to free up oil and gas – as long as strict regulations are in place. According to the [Baltimore Sun](#), the Maryland Environmental Department is considering regulations that would pave the way for fracking to begin in the state.

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On Wednesday, dozens of Maryland businesses signed onto a letter supporting a fracking moratorium. The group descended onto Annapolis to deliver the letter, local news outlet [WBAL](#) reported.

[In the letter](#), the business owners say there is “no evidence” that fracking can be effectively regulated.

“Fracking should be allowed by law in Maryland only if the technology is shown to be safe,” the letter reads. “Until that time,

gas-drilling poses unacceptable risks to the health of our families, neighbors, employees, visitors, and environment. If allowed, we fear it will undermine a Deep Creek Lake-area economy in which tourism historically has figured prominently – and dominated it for a generation.”

The letter adds that tourism is extremely important to the state – two-thirds of the tax base and more than 50 percent of jobs are traced back to the industry – and it could be severely damaged if fracking is permitted.

“We say no to water contamination, no to urban-style air pollution in our valleys, no to the perpetual truck traffic that will spell the end of our tourism industry and yes – resoundingly yes – to fracking moratorium legislation,” [said](#) Paul Roberts, co-proprietor of the Deep Creek Cellars winery.

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In a recent [state poll](#), 59 percent of respondents said natural gas drilling poses risks to Maryland's water supply. And although shy of a majority, 45 percent said they are opposed to fracking. Thirty-nine percent supported it.

Meanwhile, the Food and Water Watch advocacy group stated that about 96 percent of the studies that delve into the health consequences of fracking since 2013 *"found risks of adverse health outcomes."*

Maryland's Institute for Applied Environmental Health also found that, generally, the potential for negative public health impacts was *"high"* or *"moderately high."*

On Thursday, [a new report](#) from California, conducted by the Environmental Working Group, also shed light on what exactly can be found inside the wastewater produced by fracking.

"More than a dozen hazardous chemicals and metals as well as radiation were detected in the wastewater, some at average levels that are hundreds or thousands of times higher than the state's drinking water standards or public health goals," the group said.