



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF CONNECTICUT, INC.
1890 Dixwell Avenue, Suite 203
Hamden, CT 06514-3183
203-288-7996 Fax 203-288-7998 www.lwvct.org

CGA Environment Committee

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Support for:

HB-6329: AAC HYDRAULIC FRACTURING WASTE IN CONNECTICUT

Comments submitted by Carolyn Bayne, Water Resources Specialist, LWVCT

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut is a non-partisan statewide organization comprised of 1600 members in 27 local chapters who are committed to effective public policy and the active participation of citizens in their government.

Senator Kennedy, Senator Miner, Representative Demicco and distinguished members of the Environment Committee:

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut supports House Bill No. 6329, which would permanently prohibit the storage, disposal, handling and use of hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) waste in Connecticut. The League has long supported policies and programs which promote comprehensive long-range planning for the conservation of water resources. This bill, if enacted, would safeguard the state’s groundwater, rivers, streams, lakes, aquifers and Long Island Sound from possible exposure to the highly toxic chemicals and other hazardous materials found in fracking waste. Safe drinking water is vital not only to the health of Connecticut’s residents, but clean and safe water is also critical to a productive and growing economy.

The issue of hydraulic fracturing waste is an important one for our state. Although Connecticut does not have the geology to support fracking, neighboring states are situated over the Marcellus Shale Deposit and have vast fields of natural gas - Pennsylvania alone has nearly 8,000 active wells. Estimates vary on how many millions of gallons of water and chemicals are used to fracture each well and what percentage of it flows back, but there is no question that the volume of drilling overwhelms existing waste-handling infrastructure. Consequently, fracking waste is “shopped around” to other states.

Fracking waste can be either solid (drill cuttings, sediments and sludge) or liquid (drilling fluids, flowback and produced waters). The composition and concentration of toxicity in the waste can vary widely depending on chemicals used, geographic region where drilling takes place, whether it was reused for fracturing additional wells, and how long the wastewater was underground.

Several hundred different types of chemicals can be used in fracking, including corrosion inhibitors, surfactants, scale inhibitors, biocides and friction reducers. Under current Pennsylvania law, drillers are not required to disclose the chemicals they use, and most consider it proprietary information and do not. In addition to toxic chemicals, most wastewater from drilling in the Marcellus Shale contains high concentrations of salt, metals, and radioactive materials.

Some wastewater will be reused in future operations, depending on the level of pollutants and proximity of other fracturing sites. Eventually it will need to be transported to either Class II underground injection wells or wastewater treatment facilities, where it will be treated and discharged into surface water.

The geography of the northeast makes it difficult and costly to drill injection wells here, but there are treatment plants in Connecticut potentially interested in handling the waste from hydraulic fracturing once the current moratorium expires. Although the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) is expected to adopt regulations for fracking waste between July 1, 2017 and July 1, 2018, the question is whether waste treatment facilities, conventional or hazardous, are equipped to properly treat this harmful waste. **Since it may be difficult, if not impossible, for waste treatment facilities to properly remove known or possible human carcinogens from fracking waste that could contaminate drinking water sources, a permanent prohibition on the storage, disposal, handling and use of fracking waste is the most prudent course of action.**

It should be noted that as Pennsylvania frantically seeks solutions to managing its waste from hydraulic fracturing, actions have been undertaken in nearby states to either ban fracking waste (Vermont), enact lengthy moratoriums (Massachusetts) or otherwise severely restrict (New York) the importation of fracking waste. These actions clearly have implications for Connecticut.

The League, therefore, supports House Bill No. 6329 and urges its passage.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer our comments.