

# FLORIDA FRACKING DISASTER— PAULA DOCKERY

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The [Tampa Tribune](#) has published an editorial by ex-Florida legislator Paula Dockery



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ng in Florida could be a freaking disaster

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The oil fracking bill sailed through the Florida House but is meeting some resistance in the Senate. Let's hope senators like Charlie Dean, Anitere Flores and Tom Lee continue to oppose putting Floridians' health and safety at risk.

Fracking or fracturing is the process of drilling and then pumping water and chemicals into wells at great depths and pressures to release oil and gas from rock formations.

It is water-intensive, with millions of gallons of water needed for a single well. Up to 600 chemicals are used in fracking fluid, including known carcinogens and toxins such as lead, uranium, mercury, methanol, hydrochloric acid and formaldehyde.

Let's break down the fracking bill (SB 318).

The state is telling local governments, "You are not allowed to ban fracking or to regulate it – that is now solely up to us." Currently, 31 Florida counties and 46 cities have passed ordinances or resolutions banning or opposing fracking. If these legislative bills pass, those local governments will lose their ability to protect their communities from the health and environmental risks associated with fracking.

What happened to Republicans extolling the virtues of local control?

Next, we are asked to trust the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to consider the possibility of groundwater contamination when reviewing permits.

Quite frankly, I have little confidence in the DEP to protect citizens from contaminated ground and drinking water. It's not because there aren't some good people left with science backgrounds who care about protecting the environment. Rather, it's because bad environmental and health news could be withheld from the public if it was potentially damaging to someone's political ambitions.

One need look no further than Flint, Michigan, for a recent tragic example.

The acronym DEP stands for the Department of Environmental Protection, but over the past six years it more closely resembles the Department of Expediting Permits.

Here's my favorite part: Florida residents who drink well water would not be able to see what chemicals are being inserted in our wells. Why? Because it might expose a trade secret of a corporation benefiting from being allowed to put potential poisons in our wells. Seriously?

Lastly, DEP would conduct a study on fracking after tossing out local bans. So, taxpayers would be funding a study – for a million dollars – conducted by an agency whose marching orders have been to speed up permits to benefit industry.

The study will occur after the statutory changes have been made to start the regulatory process allowing fracking. Wouldn't it be more prudent to study the risks and dangers prior to allowing a controversial activity to occur?

Is this Legislature tone deaf? Look at the presidential race. The candidates surging in both parties are tapping into voter anger and a distrust of government. Gee, I wonder why they feel like government isn't looking out for them.

How does subjecting our water supply to unnecessary danger serve the people? Who will be held accountable when this risky endeavor leads to an unfortunate but not unforeseeable illness or natural disaster? Probably no one, as Florida's legislators can invoke their "I'm not a scientist" denials of the real risks involved.

Air pollution, water contamination, toxic wastewater, soil contamination and spills can lead to health problems – such as cancer, birth defects and respiratory illness.

Earthquakes and explosions have been attributed to fracking. What about Florida's existing problem with sinkholes? Will fracking exacerbate it?

And economically, does it even make sense? The cost of cleanup and treating health-related problems could far exceed any benefit from adding more oil to an existing worldwide glut.

Florida taxpayers are assuming all the risks and costs while one industry enjoys all the profit. That doesn't sound like a very good deal to me.

Paula Dockery is a syndicated columnist who served in the Florida Legislature for 16 years as a Republican from Lakeland. She can be reached at [PB Dockery@gmail.com](mailto:PB Dockery@gmail.com).

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