



PRESS RELEASE

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LAWSUIT DEMANDS PUBLIC TRANSPARENCY, ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS FOR OFFSHORE ACIDIZING AND FRACKING DRILLING PERMITS

SANTA BARBARA— The Environmental Defense Center (“EDC”) filed a lawsuit today challenging the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement’s (“BSEE”) failure to provide for public or environmental review prior to approving 51 oil drilling permits authorizing the use of acid well stimulation (“acidizing”) and hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) from offshore oil platforms located in the Santa Barbara Channel.

Acidizing and fracking are both dangerous oil production processes involving the injection of large amounts of water and chemicals into the ground in order to fracture or dissolve rock. The use of these highly corrosive and hazardous industrial chemicals and acids poses significant risks to water and air quality, and the many endangered species within the Santa Barbara Channel, including blue, fin, and humpback whales, and the southern sea otter.

For example, the primary chemical used in acidizing, hydrofluoric acid, is one of the most dangerous fluids utilized in any industrial process. It can damage lungs, cause severe burns, and can form a poisonous vapor cloud that stays near the ground when warmed. The use of acid and other chemicals, many undisclosed under “trade secret” laws, poses risks at all stages of use, from transportation to and from the platforms, to disposal of such chemicals through underground injection or direct discharge to the ocean.

“The environmental risks of offshore acidizing and fracking have never been carefully studied, yet the federal government continues to rubber stamp permits authorizing their use in the Santa Barbara Channel,” stated Brian Segee, Senior Attorney with EDC. “We call on the Obama administration and Interior Department to put a halt to offshore acidizing and fracking unless and until they can be proven safe for California’s irreplaceable coastline.”

The 51 permits challenged by EDC’s lawsuit authorize acidizing and fracking from six offshore platforms located off the Santa Barbara and Ventura County coasts—Gail, Gilda, Harmony, Heritage, Hondo, and Irene. The 51 permits include 19 “applications for permits to drill” and 32 “applications for permits to modify.”

Under the National Environmental Policy Act (“NEPA”), BSEE must prepare an environmental impact statement for any action that may result in significant environmental impacts. BSEE has instead approved the drilling permit applications challenged by EDC’s lawsuit pursuant to “categorical exclusions”—cursory, checklist type documents that do not analyze environmental

impacts and which are not circulated to the public. The use of categorical exclusions is only permitted under NEPA when the impacts of the proposed action have been previously studied and identified by the federal agency, and shown to be insignificant.

BSEE's approval of the drilling permit modifications challenged by EDC's lawsuit is even more truncated. For permit modifications, even where they authorize acidizing or fracking, BSEE has conducted no NEPA whatsoever.

The use of offshore well stimulation methods in California was largely unknown until last year, when EDC and news organizations discovered the use of such methods through the Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA"). EDC published a report on the issue, entitled [DIRTY WATER: FRACKING OFFSHORE CALIFORNIA](#), which documented more than a dozen instances of fracking from oil platforms within the Santa Barbara Channel.

Documents obtained through those FOIA requests demonstrated that regulators with BSEE and Bureau of Ocean Energy Management were largely unaware of offshore fracking, and did not know where or how frequently the practice had been used. Nonetheless, the agency has continued to approve drilling permits authorizing offshore well stimulation without any environmental analysis, and EDC has had to submit additional FOIA requests to obtain the drilling permits at issue in the lawsuit. The 51 permits challenged in the lawsuit were issued recently, most within the last 18 months alone.

Today's case was filed in the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California and is captioned *Environmental Defense Center v. Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement*. In addition to BSEE, the complaint also lists the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Interior Secretary Sally Jewell, and other federal officials as defendants. The complaint can be viewed [on our website](#).

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Environmental Defense Center, a non-profit law firm, protects and enhances the local environment through education, advocacy, and legal action and works primarily within Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo Counties. Founded in response to the 1969 Oil Spill more than 40 years ago, EDC has represented itself and other organizations to advance environmental protection. Program areas include protecting coast and ocean resources, open spaces and wildlife, and human and environmental health. Learn more about EDC at www.EnvironmentalDefenseCenter.org.