

Activists protest at Ohio Statehouse over oil and gas extraction, wastewater injection

By Jake Zuckerman
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COLUMBUS, Ohio – More than 40 people gathered outside the Ohio Statehouse Thursday to voice their opposition to oil and gas extraction and wastewater injection in Ohio.

Braving wind and bitter cold, they criticized state lawmakers for [allowing the gas industry to drill for natural gas underneath state parks and public lands](#). And they lashed out at regulators for what they described as overly lax oversight of injection wells, where operators inject toxic brine deep underground at high pressure.

Melinda Zemper, of Save Ohio Parks, offered five criticisms of the oil and gas industry:

- They're allowed to self-report incidents, like a [Jan. 2 explosion at a Gulfport Appalachia well pad near Salt Fork State Park](#), where flames and billowing smoke oozed into the air, requiring a five-mile evacuation
- Ohio allows "unidentified, unregulated, toxic chemicals" to be used in the fracking process
- Fracking requires millions of gallons of water
- The wastewater – a radioactive brew of water, methane runoff and the chemical cocktail pumped underground – is sometimes stored in injection wells around the state. Several of those have [allowed waste leakage reaching miles away](#)
- No statewide studies, she said, have been conducted to prove the safety of the extraction process.

The Thursday event, hosted by the Buckeye Environmental Network, spanned the better part of the day and included speakers with personal experience living near injection wells, and Justin Nobel, who wrote a [book](#) about the industry's radioactive waste "spilled, spread, injected, dumped, and freely emitted across America."

Others took aim at a state law that allows transportation officials to spread radioactive brine on roadways as a deicer – though the [Columbus Dispatch reports](#) the state ended its contract with a brine vendor in 2021 amid radioactivity concerns. An Ohio Department of Transportation spokesman said the department currently only uses a mixture of water and salt, plus cold weather additives like a molasses made of beets, calcium chloride, or magnesium chloride to lower the freezing point of the standard brine.

Any changes the activists seek would likely face a tough run inside the Statehouse. Republican lawmakers who hold supermajorities in both legislative chambers recently passed legislation opening state parks to fracking; declaring methane gas as “green energy” despite its inherently climate change-causing properties; and [allowing gas utilities to charge customers for the infrastructure costs of extending gas pipelines](#) to speculative economic development sites.

State Sen. Brian Chavez, chair of the Senate Energy committee, [owns natural gas injection wells](#), including one that state officials found allowed brine to “migrate” for miles underground.

Both chambers of the General Assembly, meanwhile, are considering legislation that’s backed by major natural gas generation companies. While the bills vary in form and are undergoing amendments, they generally aim to block distribution utilities from acquiring and operating any generation assets; end ratepayer funded subsidies of two coal plants owned in part by Ohio utilities; and (pending which version of the bill prevails) allow data centers owned by tech giants to own and operate their own natural gas generation on site.