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[Environmental groups unhappy with shale moves](#)

Marylanders Against Fracking coalition calls on O'Malley not to draft regulations this fall

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CUMBERLAND — Despite Gov. Martin O'Malley's often-expressed caution regarding drilling for natural gas trapped in Marcellus shale deposits, the governor is coming under fire from environmental groups on a recent decision by his administration. Environmentalists are also concerned about a gas project in the Port of Baltimore approved by the federal government.

The new Marylanders Against Fracking coalition called on the governor Thursday to cease any further work to allow fracking in the state. Representatives from Food & Water Watch, Potomac Riverkeeper, Patuxent Riverkeeper, Montgomery County Young Democrats, Progressive Democrats of America — Maryland Chapter and Maryland Delegate Shane Robinson held a press conference at Federal Hill Park in Baltimore to introduce the coalition, according to a news release from the organization.

“It has become clear that the O'Malley administration is intent on beginning to draft fracking regulations this fall,” said Wenonah Hauter, director of Food & Water Watch. “The fact that none of the studies that were intended to inform whether or not fracking should take place have actually been completed and that regulation writing is moving forward show that the governor has already decided fracking is going to happen in Maryland.”

Fracking is a procedure that uses water and chemicals to free gas trapped in shale formations.

Supporters of fracking in Western Maryland and elsewhere believe techniques are already available for the safe extraction of natural gas from Marcellus shale.

Coalition members said the governor's Marcellus Shale Safe Drilling Advisory Commission is "broken" since drafting of regulations began before the completion of studies by the commission, set to finish up in 2014.

"Fracking consumes massive amounts of water, devastates natural areas and agricultural lands, contaminates water, and fragments forests and communities. There are no good reasons to bring this to Maryland," said Robin Broder, vice president of Potomac Riverkeeper.

On Sept. 10, the Maryland Department of the Environment and the Department of Natural Resources closed the public comment period on the state's fracking "best management practices," the coalition press release said.

Marcellus shale formations throughout the eastern U.S. are believed to harbor large untapped natural gas resources. The shale is a sedimentary rock formation that extends underground through about 95,000 square miles in Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, West Virginia and Maryland.

In Maryland, the shale formations are found only in Allegany and Garrett counties.

Environmental groups are also expressing concern about the Dominion Cove Point LNG LP's \$3.8 billion facility on the Chesapeake Bay in Lusby. The terminal will be used to export gas to foreign countries, opening the industry's access to international markets, coalition leaders said. The federal Department of Energy has given conditional approval to the project, which still requires approval from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and state regulators.

The \$3.8 billion project would transform a small natural gas import facility on the Chesapeake Bay into a large export hub, environmentalists said.

“The U.S Department of Energy does not speak for the Marylanders who would pay the price of exporting fracked gas from Cove Point. Let's be clear: Dominion still has a steep hill to climb in receiving the necessary federal and state permits. Marylanders will be mobilizing every step of the way to challenge their plans, which threaten to virtually cover our region in new pipelines, processing plants and fracking wells,” said Mike Tidwell, director of the Chesapeake Climate Action Network.