

My name is Leslie Garcia. I live in a small Chesapeake Bay community in Southern MD called Cove Point Beach. It lies in a gentle peninsula of land that slopes 3 miles down a hill, the tip of which curls into the bay. A single 2-lane road leads in and out of our community. Cove Point Beach is a neighboring part of the larger town of Lusby, with a population exceeding 20,000.

One and one-half miles from the tip of our beach community, on this same single lane, lies Dominion's fracked gas export facility. Additionally, one mile from the same beachfront tip of our peninsula, in the bay waters, lies Dominions shipping export platform.

Initially, Dominion referred to their construction as an expansion. Most locals shrugged at the news because the facility, an import plant, had been mothballed since 1980. A year and a half later dominion began referring to the site as a liquefaction plant. Since the \$3.8 billion "expansion" was announced, concerned residents began looking into the exact ramifications of what a facility of this magnitude meant for us. While our research has proved the facility to be stunningly toxic and increasingly unsafe for local residents, the reaction to our discoveries from our own elected officials has been tepid at best, dismissive and outright contemptuous. From the governor falling asleep in a public works meeting to hostile evasions in Annapolis to eye rolling silence from our local offices. Still, we persist. It has been and continues to be important to meet with all officials.

After a year's runaround, the local police department finally, reluctantly, agreed to meet with us. The small group of SWAT officers would not answer any of our very specific questions, citing homeland security—that convenient catch-all, like the junk drawer in our kitchens. But they assured us with pabulum and platitudes that everything was safe and sound and not to worry about a thing. How could we know then that it was the police themselves that would become so worrisome?

Beginning with two phone calls about hideous, unbearable noise levels (separate occasions)

—an officer responds, saying the captain would follow up shortly (he never did)

—after refusing to answer questions at the front gate of facility, then turning desperately to police, the police response? Dominion can do whatever it wants.

—A neighbor is pulled over and surrounded by police after questioning an errant dominion employee in our neighborhood. "The officer said that he was being pulled over for harassing a dominion employee and that dominion was tired of citizens harassing their employees." When my neighbor offered his explanation, the officer replied, "you're not the plaintiff so your side of the story does not matter."

—The several occasions when SWAT officers in SUVs and sheriffs cars have come zooming down into our neighborhood, cruising back and forth in a frenzied search for peaceful protesters. These officers wear lanyards with double-sided identity tags: one side says Dominion employee, the other sheriff's dept. On one occasion the stop included personal pat-downs of all passengers, drug sniffing dogs, car searches and one arrest, apparently for prescription drugs w/out the prescription present. Dominion's chief of security, Lou Blancato was present at this "stop" within minutes of stop. The ultimate offense? Out of state tags.

—At a public hearing, an officer brusquely informed us that we could not set up our tabling tent in full view of parking lot, demanding it be moved to the less advantageous back. When we pointed to dominion's elaborate set up and prime spot, arguing for fair play, he retorted, it's their gig, they can do what they want. We had to point out that it was a PUBLIC affair, NOT dominions. Clearly misinformed, he relented but not without admonishing us not to step on grass or yellow line or whatever insignificant thing he could point to.

—At a CCHC & WACP-sponsored 6-mile walk, a peaceful march of over 200 people, the police escorted us on our walk, citing safety, and then refused us entry onto our two-lane road, citing same. No one has ever before or since been stopped from walking on the sides of this road. As we all filed past into the parking lot to catch a bus for the last 1/2 mile to the park, the SWAT police stood at the intersection photographing and filming every one of us.

—A month or more ago, 5 of us, standing safely and peacefully on a friend's lawn, on this same 2-lane road, held out banners demanding a Quantitative Risk Assessment. Not fewer than 5 police cars and SWAT suvs drove back and forth, one slowing down to film us.

We have been protesting safely and peacefully for citizens interests and rights for a few years now. When we have put ourselves in the position of getting arrested, we have been peaceful and respectful, expecting the same in return. Like so many white and privileged Americans, I have never been particularly fearful of police, indeed, quite the opposite. My shared experiences with getting to, and disseminating the truth of this ill-conceived fracked gas facility has completely changed that view. The unapologetic level of intimidation and obstruction of civil rights by the police, sanctioned by a corporate entity, is terrifying. There is a dangerous blurring of the lines here, an outrageous conflict of interest and complete corporatization of a public service—policing. This is corporate and government collusion that undermines citizen interests and rights. And this, FERC asserts, is another community unimpacted by their approving machine?

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