HOW A PHYSICS PROFESSOR SAVED ITALY FROM BIG OIL THROUGH EDUCATION, ACTIVISM, AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

SPEAKER: Maria D’Orsogna

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DATE: Wednesday, January 17th, 2018
TIME: 3:00-4:00 pm
LOCATION: ENR2, S107

ABSTRACT:

Trained as a physicist, Dr. Maria D’Orsogna is a hands-on activist fighting to protect the Italian countryside and seas from Big Oil. Maria first learned of proposed oil activities in her home region of Abruzzo, Italy. Oil companies planned to drill onshore and at sea, uprooting century-old wineries to build wells, refineries and pipelines, effectively turning scenic Abruzzo into an oil district. Although based in California - 6,000 miles away - Maria took it upon herself to raise awareness and educate the public at large. She blended her scientific training, her experience as a professor, and her strong desire for social justice into an environmental movement that rapidly spread across the country. She traveled from town to town in Italy, educating citizens about environmental and health effects, debating Big Oil, exposing political corruption, putting pressure on decision makers to act for the common good. In California she used social networks and blogging to coordinate letter writings, to keep raising awareness and spur action. Thanks to public uproar, spearheaded by Maria's unwavering efforts, Abruzzo banned oil drilling and for the first time ever, the Italian parliament imposed a no-drill zone of 12 miles encompassing all of Italy's 5,000 mile coastline. Overall she stopped at least 40 oil leases, earning the nickname "Erin Brockovich of Italy". Maria's story is a testament of how, by engaging with the community, scientists and educators can truly make a difference.