

Experts Say 'Fracking' Poisons Drinking Water for Millions

By Frank Whalen

Some see innovations in natural gas extraction as the solution to American dependence on foreign oil and a homegrown industry that can save the U.S. economy. Critics, however, claim that these innovators have poisoned water supplies across the country, resulting in now worthless properties, illnesses, disease and even deaths. Now, three Democratic legislators are looking for answers after the Department of Energy's (DOE) Advisory Board Subcommittee on Shale Gas Production released a report revealing the dangers associated with the industry's preferred method of gas extraction, called hydro-fracturing or "fracking."

According to the website *FrackAction*, fracking is "a process where water, sand and chemicals are injected into the earth at high pressure. The aim of hydro-fracturing is to fracture rock formations deep underground in the hope of liberating natural gas that would be otherwise inaccessible, and to bring it to the surface."

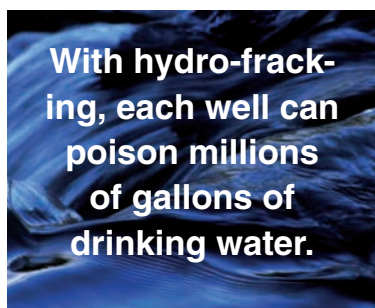
The DOE's subcommittee reported recently that "concerted and sustained action is needed to avoid excessive environmental impacts of shale gas production and the consequent risk of public opposition to its continuation and expansion."

Investigative reporter Ian Urbina has studied the issue in depth. Last year, Urbina wrote, "With hydro-fracking, a well can produce over a million gallons of wastewater that is often laced with highly corrosive salts, carcinogens like benzene and radioactive elements like radium."

Urbina stated that internal documents from the EPA re-



A toxic slurry pond, i.e., a pit that catches contaminated water from "fracking." Fracking is the process where water, sand and chemicals are injected into the earth at extremely high pressure to release natural gas.



veal: "The wastewater, which is sometimes hauled to sewage plants not designed to treat it and then discharged into rivers that supply drinking water, contains radioactivity at levels higher than previously known and far higher than the level that federal regulators say is safe for these treatment plants to handle."

They also reported on the adverse health effects these gas wells cause by polluting the air. Kelly Gant, whose 14-year-old daughter and 11-year-old son have experienced severe asthma attacks, dizzy spells and headaches, said that "it's ruining us."

Claire Sandberg, executive director for *FrackAction*, agrees. "People have been the guinea pigs for this industry," she told AFP. "Natural gas companies are moving in like an organized criminal gang and intimidating people into silence."

Ms. Sandberg referred to incidents of cancer and even death in some cases where exposure to fracking seems the only cause.

As communities begin taking notice of this issue, citizens are attempting to take a stand against water being poisoned for profit. They are faced with

lies and distortions from a mainstream media bent on supporting natural gas as more environmentally friendly, and therefore a solution to the alleged global warming issue. Some media are even a party to outright deception.

The New York Post ran an editorial about the "ample economic rewards of natural gas drilling." However, the *Post* did not disclose to its readers that the statistics the piece was citing came from a study "sponsored by a lobbying group representing gas companies."

The natural gas boom has caused industry growth to outpace regulation, while once again energy companies have been at work behind the scenes to ensure astronomical profit margins.

According to a *60 Minutes* report on fracking, there exists something called the Halliburton loophole. "Halliburton is a leading fracking company," reported *60 Minutes*, "and the loophole was created in 2005 under Vice President Dick Cheney [onetime] Halliburton's CEO."

The New York Times described this loophole in a Nov. 2, 2009 editorial: "It stripped the Environmental Protection Agency of its authority to regulate a drilling process called hydraulic fracturing. Invented by Halliburton in the 1940s, it involves injecting a mixture of water, sand and chemicals, some of them toxic, into underground rock formations to blast them open and release natural gas."

Gas companies leasing private property for exploration and extraction can sound like an attractive prospect to a homeowner suffering from a declining economy. However, there are cautionary tales that show otherwise.

Elisabeth Radow of the law firm Cuddy & Feder LLP wrote in the New York State Bar Association journal,



Hydraulic fracturing has created a boom in domestic supplies of natural gas liquids. But environmentalists and concerned citizens say the extraction method has contaminated drinking water sources. PHOTO: INHABITAT.COM

"When Ellen Harrison signed a gas lease agreement in 2008, a company representative made no mention of fracking. Harrison received no details, only the chance for a win-win with clean gas for the locals and royalties for her."

Radow continued: "Residential fracking carries heavy industrial risks, and the ripple effects could be tremendous. Homeowners can be confronted with uninsurable property damage for activities they cannot control. Now a growing number of banks won't give new mortgage loans on homes with gas leases because they don't meet secondary mortgage market guidelines. This shift of drilling risks from gas companies to the housing sector, homeowners and taxpayers creates a perfect storm."

Ms. Sandberg told this reporter during a Nov. 11 interview: "The people who sign leases never see the promised money materialize, as the projections were based on faulty data. Gas companies are now being investigated by the SEC as a ponzi scheme, and they've been compared to Enron."

Ms. Sandberg's recommendation is that "people should organize locally and act nationally. Contact President Obama, who holds the tie-breaking vote regarding allowing gas drilling in the Delaware River Watershed on Nov. 21. This is the source of drinking water for over 15 million people, and fracking has already caused a water contamination epidemic."

Already, there are allies in Congress who oppose fracking. These include the following Democratic legislators: Reps. Diana DeGette (D-Colo.), Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) and Edward Markey (D-Mass.), who wrote a letter demanding more information from the DOE following the release of its report on the matter.

"Gas is not a bridge to the future in America," Ms. Sandberg told AFP. "It's a bridge to nowhere." ★

Frank Whalen has been a radio talk show host for the past 17 years, and worked as a consultant for *Maxim* magazine. For more news and views from Frank, see www.frankwhalenlive.com.

