

Don't Frack Michigan



Gas Companies Tell the Truth About Fracking

“Our business involves a variety of operating risks, including well site blowouts; cratering and explosions; equipment failures; uncontrolled flows of natural gas, oil or well fluids; fires; formations with abnormal pressures; pollution and other environmental risks; and natural disasters. Any of these events could result in injury or loss of human life, loss of hydrocarbons, significant damage to or destruction of property, environmental pollution...” (Cabot Energy, 2008 10-K disclosure form to the Securities Exchange Commission SEC). The SEC requires companies to disclose significant risk factors to protect investors and stockholders. Truth in advertising, however, does not extend to the public.

The information given to the SEC is NOT divulged to homeowners asked to sign drilling leases. It is NOT given out to communities where these wells are located. Instead, we are fed “The Lady in the Pantsuit” TV version of gas drilling extolling its virtues as safe, clean and good for the economy.

Who Protects the Public? The Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, Superfund Act and the Michigan water withdrawal rules were enacted to protect public health and the environment. But gas and oil companies fought for and won exemptions from ALL these acts. The Halliburton Loophole in the 2005 energy bill even exempted them from the Safe Drinking Water Act.

As a result, every state allowing horizontal fracking has experienced poisoned air, rivers and streams; gas well leaks and explosions; debilitating health problems; dead wildlife and livestock; earthquakes; toxic gas plumes causing families to evacuate their homes; poisoned and exploding water wells; loss of property value and ruined roads from 24-hour truck traffic.

Northern Michigan residents dodged a bullet on Christmas Eve when a plume of deadly hydrogen sulfide gas escaped from a frack fluid injection well. Fortunately, winds dispersed the gas before it could fall in high concentrations in populated areas. People smelled the gas in Charlevoix, Boyne City, Harbor Springs and Cheboygan, over 80 miles from the release site. Also in the news is the spike in earthquakes in Oklahoma, Arkansas and most recently Ohio. The US Geological Survey cited underground injection of drilling waste water and chemicals as the likely culprit. These earthquakes have, and will continue to damage homes and businesses, and fracture rock, allowing for the upward migration of toxic frack fluid.

The DEQ claims to have the best regulations in the country, but they cannot even force companies to clean up when accidents and damage to forests, water and communities occur. Significant changes were made to Michigan’s Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (NREPA) in December 2010 to accommodate industry needs. Attorney Joseph Quandt explained these changes at an industry seminar, reported on in Oil and Gas News, 2/25/11).

“The new law has a burden of proof clause in which the government bears the burden of proof that contamination has occurred...old operational memorandums, bulletins and other instructions of the Michigan DEQ are specifically excluded from having any legal effect and cannot be enforced.” He also explained that self-directed cleanups without DEQ involvement are now allowed, and that economics can now be considered with equal weight with other factors when proposing a cleanup plan. In other words, in most cases the taxpayers foot the bill to clean up the mess.

One more industry advantage - ownership of the mineral rights to land takes precedence over surface rights ownership. The future of the Jordan River and all our rivers and forests in Michigan are in danger. Chesapeake Energy report to the SEC spells it out.

“We embarked on an aggressive lease acquisition program, which we have referred to as the ‘gas shale land grab’ of 2006 through 2008 and the ‘unconventional oil land grab’ of 2009 and 2010. We believed that the winner of these land grabs would enjoy competitive advantages for decades to come...” Chesapeake’s 13.2 million acre land grab comprises an area twice the size of Maryland. Most of the leases (some 500,000 acres) in Michigan have been on state land. Now consider that according to the DEQ, at least 5 million gallons of water

are needed to frack a well, the same amount needed to grow 8-10 acres of corn for an entire growing season. The difference - most of the water used to grow corn goes back into the hydrologic cycle in some way. Now picture Michigan with thousands of horizontal fracking wells, each using millions of gallons of water which becomes so toxic it can NEVER be returned to the hydrologic cycle. It is happening in other states, and the groundwork is being put in place to do it here. This does not bode well for the future of our rivers, streams and forests.

Horizontal fracking is a shortsighted industrialization of rural and forested landscapes which benefits only a privileged few. Its total carbon footprint is dirtier than coal. As long as these companies enjoy exemptions and subsidies not available to other businesses, green and sustainable energy will not have a chance. The exemptions and subsidies must end.

People who live and work in Michigan should be provided with the same information enjoyed by shareholders and investors on the dangers and risks of horizontal fracking. We deserve the truth from the gas companies and from the DEQ, not the rosy lies we get from the TV lady in the pantsuit.

Fracking has been banned in Quebec, France and South Africa. Over 100 municipalities around the country have passed resolutions against fracking, including Detroit, Wayne County and Cross Village. Over 4,000 citizens in Northern Michigan have signed a petition from Don't Frack Michigan calling for a state-wide ban. Several other groups around the state are circulating similar petitions. Our efforts, along with those of groups throughout the state and the country, can make a difference. Visit dontfrackmichigan.org for more information, including scientific studies, videos, links to other groups around the country, latest available information on well locations, and how to contact us if you would like to get involved.

Anne Zukowski