

EARTHWORKS

HYDRAULIC FRACTURING OF OIL AND GAS WELLS

Hydraulic fracturing is a common technique used to stimulate the production of oil and natural gas. Typically, fluids are injected underground at high pressures, the formations fracture, and the oil or gas flows more freely out of the formation. Some of the injected fluids remain trapped underground. A number of these fluids, such as diesel fuel, qualify as hazardous materials and carcinogens, and are toxic enough to contaminate groundwater resources. Read more details in OGAP's basic [primer on hydraulic fracturing](#).

Threats to Water Quality

There are a number of cases in the U.S. where hydraulic fracturing is the prime suspect in incidences of impaired or polluted drinking water. In Alabama, Colorado, New Mexico, Virginia, West Virginia and Wyoming, incidents have been recorded in which [residents have reported changes in water quality or quantity following fracturing operations of gas wells near their homes](#). Read the [Amos](#) and [Hocutt](#) landowner stories for two accounts of water contamination that occurred following hydraulic fracturing events. Another example: a [ProPublica story](#) links methane in Colorado drinking water to drilling.

According to the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission, [90 percent of oil and gas wells in the U.S. undergo fracturing](#) to stimulate production. Natural gas development is booming in the U.S., particularly coalbed methane (CBM) development; hundreds of companies are looking to drill for CBM wherever there are viable deposits of coal. In at least ten states (Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Montana, New Mexico, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia and Wyoming), these coal formations contain drinking water aquifers.



Fracking Fact Sheet

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Reports, Fact Sheets, Testimony

- [Our Drinking Water at Risk](#). OGAP's review of the EPA's final study on Evaluation of Impacts to Underground Sources of Drinking Water by Hydraulic Fracturing of Coalbed Methane Reservoirs. (April, 2005)
- [Hydraulic Fracturing: a brief overview of the issues](#). EARTHWORKS Fact Sheet
- [Hydraulic Fracturing: How Fracturing Works](#). EARTHWORKS Fact Sheet
- [Hydraulic Fracturing: Myths and Facts](#) EARTHWORKS fact sheet
- [Hydraulic Fracturing of Coalbed Methane Wells: A Threat to Drinking Water](#) (January 2002, Prepared by Natural Resources Defense Council)
- [Review of Phase II Hydrogeologic Study for Garfield County Colorado](#) by Geoffrey Thyne (December 2008)
- [Expert Testimony on Hydraulic Fracturing Impacts](#) by John D. Bredehoeft (May 2003)

News stories

- [Energy Industry Sways Congress With Misleading Data](#), by Abraham Lustgarten. 7/8/09.
- [Colorado Study Links Methane in Water to Drilling](#), by Abraham Lustgarten, ProPublica, 4/22/09
- [Officials in Three States Pin Water Woes on Gas Drilling](#), by Abraham Lustgarten, ProPublica, 4/26/09
- Watch the video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbIyR-hw7Eo>), Fracking and the Environment: Natural Gas Drilling, Hydraulic Fracturing and Water Contamination, from Democracy Now! It includes an interview with ProPublica's Abraham Lustgarten. 9/3/09.
- EARTHWORKS webpage about the [Inadequate regulation of hydraulic fracturing](#)

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