

Concern About Hydrofracking is not Trivial

By Dr. Dennis C. Duling, Ph.D., Emeritus Professor, Canisius College. This article appeared in the Lewiston-Porter Sentinel on July 23, 2011.

Horizontal hydrofracking is about a decade old. In this technology a vertical shaft is drilled deeply into the earth. It then makes an arc (“the kickoff point”) that allows the extension of drilling a number of horizontal shafts in multiple directions (“multi-pad wells”) that spread out for as much as a mile. A mixture of water (usually), sand, and chemicals (the “cocktail”) is forced at extremely high pressure through encased pipes. Small electrical blasts perforate the pipes and the shale, allowing the gas to escape back through the pipes to the surface.

About 5 million gallons of water or more are needed for each well. This huge draw on the water supply usually requires the construction of ponds in advance of fracking. About 25 percent of the salty and chemically contaminated frack brine returns to the surface for treatment and eventual release back into the environment. Historically, it has been trucked or piped to a water purification facility. Representatives of the natural gas industry and some politicians state that high volume horizontal hydrofracking of the Marcellus Shale in the southern tier of New York state will be a job-creating economic boom that will also help to save western New York. It is claimed that fracking is safe and that the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation has the resources to monitor the anticipated “Gas Rush.” In a press report State Sen. Maziarz agrees and has recently said, “A moratorium on hydrofracking is tantamount to a moratorium to economic progress in this important region of the state.” Yet, there is, as indicated by recent public opinion polls, serious, widespread concern about hydrofracking in New York State. There is good reason. A Plan of the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), whose hydrofracking report is due in late 2012, with a follow-up in 2014, says, “In almost all stages of the hydraulic fracturing water lifecycle, there is potential for fracturing fluids and/or naturally occurring substances to be introduced into drinking water resources.” Methane, says the EPA, is a greenhouse gas that contributes to global warming.

Some scientists say that it is not a green fuel and is potentially worse for the environment than coal. A recent Cornell University study reports that between 3.6 to 7.9 percent of the methane in a hydrofracking well escapes into the atmosphere. Duke University scientists say that hydrofracked wells in Susquehanna County, PA, have contaminated drinking water with methane and are a potential explosion hazard. A recent U.S. Forestry Survey study says that saline frack water that was spread on the ground killed all ground plants within two days, turned tree leaves brown within 10 days, and killed about 150 trees within two years. There are more concrete examples. The Chesapeake Corporation, a major player in the natural gas industry, defends hydrofracking. On April 19, 2011, a fracking “blowout” occurred at one of its wells in Bradford County, PA. Thousands of gallons of frack fluid covered the landscape, and then migrated to the Susquehanna River, which feeds the Chesapeake Bay. The state of Maryland now has a lawsuit against the corporation for polluting Chesapeake Bay.

New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman launched a lawsuit against the federal government in order to force a full scale study of the potential (www.press-connects.com/article/20110601/NEWS10/106010311/NY-sue-over-hydrofracking-study) environmental impacts of hydraulic fracturing in the Delaware River Basin, which provides drinking water for New York City and a third of New Jersey. New Jersey has banned hydrofracking.

The Municipal Authority of McKeesport, PA, once released 80,000 gallons of frack brine per day into the Youghiogheny and Monogahela Rivers upstream from Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh has banned hydrofracking. Indeed, in May, 2011, Pennsylvania waste treatment plants stopped taking any liquid frack waste because it was determined that chlorine treatment creates trihalomethanes, a carcinogen that is a “birth disruptor.” Even the claim of an economic boom is questioned. Confidential industry documents pub-

lished in The New York Times’ “Drilling Down” series speak of uncertainty about how long wells will produce gas, of abandoned bores at shallower depths that could lead to pollution of the water supply, of an “irrational exuberance” in the industry, of the bottleneck of getting rid of frack water, and of possible bankrupt companies. It is claimed that the DEC will carefully monitor hydrofracking. Will it have the resources? The former head of the DEC was fired because he objected to 200 employees in DEC being laid off. In contrast, the Pennsylvania DEP had doubled its staff in the wake of hydrofracking. Recently, the country of France banned hydrofracking. Finally, the DEC’s recent “Preliminary Revised Draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement” bans hydrofracking in the New York City and Syracuse “unfiltered” watersheds, state lands, and “primary” aquifers for drinking water of municipalities. Why these bans, if hydrofracking is safe?

Concern about hydrofracking is not trivial. A moratorium should continue at least until the EPA study appears.

Push to Deregulate Environmental Protection is Dangerous

Several states are considering lowering protection for the environment.

The Governor of Maine wants to open three million acres of the north Woods for development and overturn a law to monitor toxic chemicals that have been found in children’s toys.

The Governor of Florida is trying to eliminate millions of dollars in outlays for land conservation, and to cut funds to restore the Everglades.

In North Carolina, some leaders are proposing cutting operation funds for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources by 22 percent.

The need to educate and mobilize the public to protect the environment has never been greater.

New Environmental Group Formed

The following letter has been sent to every congregation in western New York of the United Church of Christ and of the Disciples of Christ last August. However, representatives from congregations of any other religious group are also welcome. It is not too late to join! The group plans to work in close cooperation with the Sierra Club and with Residents for Responsible Government as well as with other environmental groups.

There is power in our unity. Caring for the environment is part of our Christian stewardship. We are awed by the beauty of nature and grateful to the Creator. But we live in a time when the environment is being polluted and damaged to an unprecedented extent. Churches need to come together with a sense of urgency and commitment to stand up for the world God has entrusted to our care.

Two urgent and immediate concerns are hydrofracking and the disposal of hazardous wastes. Other issues will be brought to the fore in the future. Hydrofracking is a method of removing natural gas from deep in the earth that often pollutes the groundwater and destroys the natural environment. Many communities have acted to prohibit it because of the destruction it causes. New

York State is moving toward allowing hydrofracking in most of the State, but banning it in the watershed area of New York City. We deserve the same protection here that is offered to those living downstate.

Despite the fact that the Department of Environmental Conservation has said that no new toxic waste landfills are needed, Chemical Waste Management is pressing ahead for a permit to build a massive new landfill in Niagara County. The current toxic landfill there will be filled and closed within 5 years, so CWM want to keep importing dangerous materials here for years to come. Trucks from 30 states sometimes leak as they pass our homes and schools, and the wastes are buried in the watershed area of Lake Ontario. The permit application needs to be denied.

Taking a stand in behalf of preserving our land and waters and protecting the health of our people is a Christian duty. It is as much part of our Christian witness as Bible study or services of praise. Therefore the Western Area of the United Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ is forming an Environmental Task Force so as to educate and mobilize our people. Each congregation needs to have one representative on this Task Force. Roger

Cook and I, as co-chairs of the newly created Environmental Task Force, urge you to take this seriously. Please enlist a committed person and inform me, not later than August 15, of the name, mailing address, phone number, and email address of your representative. You can reach me at 335 Walnut Lane, Youngstown, NY 14174, or by phoning 716 745 7037 or emailing me at clamb9@roadrunner.com

The Task Force will meet when deemed necessary, but most of our work may be done by email or phone contact, plus mailings. When it is urgent that people write to their representatives, write to the newspapers, sign a petition, or attend a public hearing, the Task Force member will be informed and asked to promote this action in the congregation. We will also plan educational events for the Task Force members.

I hope you agree with us that the concern is important, the time is urgent, and that this call to action is timely. Please share this letter with others in your church and get in touch with me as soon as possible.

Sincerely,
Charles Lamb

Vatican plea

"We call on all people and nations to recognise the serious and potentially irreversible impacts of global warming caused by the anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants, and by changes in forests, wetlands, grasslands, and other land uses. We appeal to all nations to develop and implement, without delay, effective and

fair policies to reduce the causes and impacts of climate change on communities and ecosystems, including mountain glaciers and their watersheds, aware that we all live in the same home. By acting now, in the spirit of common but differentiated responsibility, we accept our duty to one another and to the stewardship of a planet blessed with the gift of life. We are

committed to ensuring that all inhabitants of this planet receive their daily bread, fresh air to breathe and clean water to drink as we are aware that, if we want justice and peace, we must protect the habitat that sustains us. The believers among us ask God to grant us this wish."