

Dangers of Fracking

by Karina McAbee

So what is fracking? Fracking, or hydraulic fracturing, is a process of drilling deep into the earth, past the aquifer and into a layer of shale, then drilling horizontally for thousands of feet, and pumping a mixture of water, sand and chemicals at such high pressure that it fractures the shale and releases the methane gas (commonly known as 'natural gas') that's trapped within. Millions of gallons of this fracking fluid are injected into each well. Each well uses millions of gallons of water and 40,000 gallons of chemicals, none of which they are required to disclose, but include arsenic, benzene, formaldehyde, lead, mercury, hydrochloric acid, radium and uranium... The only thing they are prohibited by law from using is diesel fuel.

The gas and oil fracking industry, thanks to Dick Cheney, is exempt from the Safe Drinking Water Act, and the Clean Air Act and has loopholes in many other laws that were intended to protect us from exactly this kind of threat.

What are the dangers of fracking?

First, only 25-50% of the fracking fluid is recovered. The rest stays in the earth and can slowly seep up into the aquifer over time. The recovered fracking fluid is stored in lined pits, which evaporate and can leak - or it's injected deep into the earth and is suspected of causing over 1000 earthquakes in states which rarely experience them.

2nd, the released methane not captured by the well pump can rise up towards the surface through the fissures and into the aquifer - and then into people's wells. Methane is an explosive hazard (meaning your house or the well itself could explode), and it's toxic to humans. In Gasland 2, using a special camera, one can see huge clouds of methane pouring from the fracking wells.

3rd, the fracking drills are encased in cement, and according to the gas industry, over 5% of all these cement casings fail immediately, and after 30 years, at least 50% will have failed and leaked. So if there are 1000 wells in the county, within 30 years, at least 500 of them will be leaking methane and some undisclosed chemical soup into the ground and into our water.

Especially in a time of drought, diverting water from agriculture to fracking is a really bad idea. And the health consequences are equally bad and only beginning to be studied. So far, fracking has been documented to cause low birth weight and an increase in birth defects, nosebleeds, severe headaches, rashes and lung problems. 15 million Americans now live within a mile of a fracking well, and one million new wells are planned in the next decade. In Illinois, there is a housing development where many of the homes have fracking wells in their back yards!

We should all be aware that not only will our home owners insurance not cover us in the event of a fracking "accident", but if you consent to have a well on your property, you can be held personally liable for any damage caused by the fracking operation, once the gas company leaves. A Texas rancher, who has to haul in \$1000 worth of water each month because his well is full of gas, is being sued for defamation by the gas company! If we don't stand together to ban fracking, each one of us harmed will have to stand alone and defend ourselves.

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Ban Fracking in Mendocino County

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