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Gas drilling in TV spotlight

Industry at center of 'CSI' episode

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Hollywood, meet one of the Southern Tier's most divisive issues.

Popular CBS television drama "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation" took a crack at hydraulic fracturing -- a natural gas extraction technique -- with a storyline Thursday that centered around a fictional gas company, poisoned water and a pair of murders.

Titled "Fracked," the episode featured a journalist who was on the brink of exposing "Conservo Solutions" of contaminating water through hydrofracking when two of her sources turned up dead. At one point, a rancher set off a massive explosion when he dropped a cigarette down his water well.

While the episode ended inconclusively, the gas company was thought to be behind the killings to keep the story from getting out.

The real-life natural gas industry was not amused. Chris Tucker, a spokesman for trade group Energy In Depth, was particularly critical of the explanation of hydrofracking by lead actor Laurence Fishburne's character. After researching fracking on a website made to look like Wikipedia, Fishburne described the fracking process while a visual with the words "water pollution" showed on the screen.

"The last time I saw Laurence Fishburne caught in an alternate on-screen reality, he was kicking it with (actor) Keanu (Reeves) in 'The Matrix,'" Tucker said. "Thursday's 'CSI' wasn't as good as that, but certainly his character's ridiculous attempt at defining what hydraulic fracturing is, where it's used and how it's regulated was reminiscent of some of those earlier, not-of-this-world performances."

Dimock, Pa., resident Norma Fiorentino said she didn't watch Thursday's show, but said she thought it was great that the hydrofracking issue was getting national exposure. A 2009 explosion from Fiorentino's water well destroyed a concrete slab that was covering it.

Cabot Oil & Gas, which operated a nearby gas well, disputes that an explosion occurred.

"The people need to know what is happening here," Fiorentino said.

Additional Facts

Fracking on '60 Minutes'

"CSI" isn't the only CBS program that will take on the hydrofracking issue this week. Newsmagazine "60 Minutes" will feature a story on the natural gas stimulation technique at 7 p.m. Sunday. The story will feature residents from Louisiana and Dimock, Pa., as well as Chesapeake Energy CEO Aubrey McClendon. Locally, "60 Minutes" is shown on WBNG-TV.