

EDITORIAL: Hydrofracking carries too many unknowns

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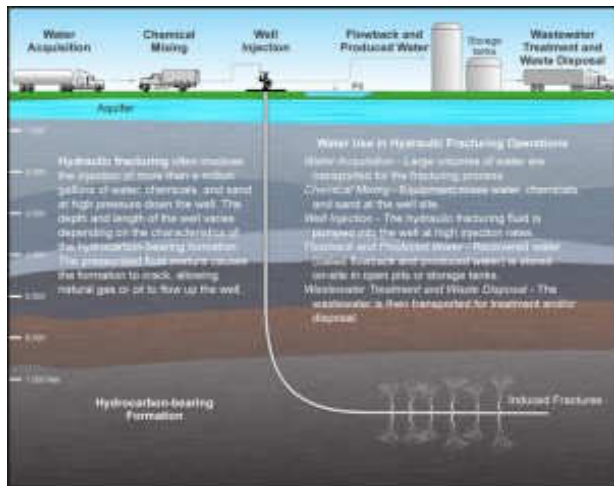
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2,2-Dibromo-3-Nitrilopropionamide Glycol Ethers, 2-butoxyethanol Guar gum, 2-methyl-4-isothiazolin-3-one Hemicellulase Enzyme, 5-chloro-2-methyl-4-isothiazotin-3-one Hydrochloric Acid, Acetic Acid Hydrotreated light distillate, Acetic Anhydride, Hydrotreated Light Distilled, Aliphatic Acid Isopropanol, Aliphatic Alcohol Polyglycol Ether Isopropyl Alcohol, Ammonia Persulfate, Magnesium Nitrate, Aromatic Hydrocarbon Mesh Sand (Crystalline Silica), Aromatic Ketones Methanol, Boric Acid Mineral Spirits, Boric Oxide Monoethanolamine, Butan-1-01 Petroleum Distillate Blend, Citric Acid

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Petroleum Distillates, Crystalline Silica, Cristobalite Polyethoxylated Alkanol (1), Crystalline Silica: Quartz Polyethoxylated Alkanol (2), Dazomet Polyethylene Glycol Mixture, Diatomaceous Earth Polysaccharide, Ethane-1,2-diol Potassium Hydroxide, Ethoxylated Alcohol Prop-2-yn-1-01, Ethoxylated Alcohol Propan-2-01, Ethoxylated Octylphenol Propargyl Alcohol, Ethylene Glycol Propylene, Ethylhexanol Sodium Bicarbonate, Ferrous Sulfate Heptahydrate Sodium Chloride, Formaldehyde Sodium Hydroxide, Glutaraldehyde Sucrose, Tetramethylammonium Chloride, Hydrochloric Acid, Propargyl Alcohol, Acetic Acid, Acetic Anhydride, Methanol Boric Oxide, Petroleum Distillate Blend, Polysaccharide, Potassium Carbonate, Sodium Chloride, Potassium Hydroxide, Ethylene Glycol, Boric Acid, Sodium Bicarbonate, Monoethanolamine, Hydrotreated light distillate, Ethoxylated Alcohol, Glutaraldehyde, Dazomet, Sodium Hydroxide, Polyethylene Glycol Mixture.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, the substances listed above are just a few of the more than 590 chemicals pumped into the ground during hydraulic fracturing, or hydrofracking, the controversial process used to extract vast amounts of natural gas from the Marcellus Shale region.

These chemicals, some of them cancerous, are combined with sand and millions of gallons of water to create a slurry, which is forced thousands of feet into the ground at high pressure, where it is then used to create fractures in the shale and free up the reserves of natural gas trapped inside the rock. A significant amount of contaminated water and gas is brought back up to the surface through a process known as "flowback." That material is then stored in big lined pits or hauled away in trucks.

Gas extraction from the Marcellus Shale region through hydrofracking has the potential to reinvigorate the upstate economy with thousands of jobs and ease our dependence on foreign oil.

The Marcellus reserve - which includes parts of Ohio, West Virginia, New York and Pennsylvania - contains 50 trillion cubic feet of natural gas that could be extracted, enough to supply the East Coast for 50 years. Full development of such a fuel project could create 280,000 jobs over 10 years. It's the American version of a Middle East oil field, right in our own backyard.

But Marcellus Shale region is located in a watershed that provides drinking water to 17 million people, from Philadelphia to New York City, including a significant portion of central New York.

Fully half of New York's population draws its drinking water from unfiltered water in the watershed.

All residents of the state should be concerned about the potential impact of this practice on the environment and the water supply. And therefore, all residents should be concerned at the speed at which the state Department of Environmental Conservation is moving on creating new regulations for the drilling.

The DEC is hoping to complete its regulations by June, refusing to wait for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to complete its own, more exhaustive review of the process.

To hear the fuel industry tell it, the chemicals they use in the process are as pure as mamma's milk and that fears of contamination are being driven by hysteria.

After viewing the anti-hydrofracking documentary, "Gasland" (now playing on HBO), Brad Gill of the poststar.com/.../article_5079b9f0-3718-...

Independent Oil and Gas Association said, "a Hollywood actor holding a class of cloudy water proves nothing except that fear-mongering and emotion will always trump science and logic."

But James Northrup, a former energy company executive who speaks out regularly on the subject, compared the hydrofracking process to "exploding a bomb underground," adding that "the pressures, volumes, and horizontal configuration of the well make it more likely that chemicals and natural gas will pollute aquifers than a conventional vertical well."

How many times do we have to listen to large corporations with millions of dollars at stake tell us that everything is safe before we react with some skepticism?

Aren't they still cleaning up an oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico from a supposedly safe process?

Citing proprietary considerations, the companies involved won't even tell the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency all the chemicals they use in the process or the concentrations of such chemicals in the water/sand mixture. That should tell you something.

Studies conducted by the energy companies show little risk of contamination and little evidence of problems. Studies conducted by New York City's Department of Environmental Protection and environmental groups cite numerous examples of contamination of groundwater and aquifers around the country. The EPA, in a 140-page draft plan issued Wednesday to study hydrofracking, lists far too many potential problems for comfort.

New York state simply can't take the risk. There are plenty of places to find fuel. It's not so easy to find a new water supply for 17 million people. New York's geology - criss-crossed with fractures, fissures and seismological faults - is not comparable to the conditions in Texas, Wyoming, Nebraska, Colorado and other places where the process has proven successful. In addition, we have more people concentrated in the area who might be potentially affected by a mishap.

Yes, we all crave cheaper fuel. And yes, jobs are vitally important, particularly in economically depressed areas like central New York. But hydrofracking companies have not developed a process that even remotely suggests that the environment and the water supply can be protected.

Until the industry can prove that its methods won't harm New Yorkers, the state should continue to withhold all approvals for hydrofracking activities.

Local editorials represent the opinion of The Post-Star editorial board, which consists of Publisher Rick Emanuel, Editor Ken Tingley, Editorial Page Editor Mark Mahoney and citizen member Mike Wild.

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