

## Sides in fracking debate try to discredit claims



Written by

**Jon Campbell**  
Staff Writer

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It came almost immediately.

Only a few hours after media reports began popping up on a [Cornell University](#) study about greenhouse emissions related to hydraulic fracturing, an industry trade group released a 2,000-word rebuttal meant to debunk it.

The Cornell study -- which contends methane seeping from wells during drilling and hydrofracking has a greater 20-year impact on global warming than coal emissions -- is the latest in a long line of reports heralded by one side of the issue and ripped by the other. It's a larger symbol of the three-year-old debate: The two sides of the argument don't agree on much of anything and move quickly to discredit the other's claims, leaving some wondering where to find the facts on the hotly contested issue.

"I'm struck by the fact that people on both sides of the debate hear, but don't listen,"

said Don Siegel, a hydrology professor at Syracuse University and a shale gas proponent. "The discourse has gotten far too polarized to the point where people just refuse to compromise or even consider the other side of the argument."

Many of those both for and against gas drilling have called for policy decisions to be based on sound science and facts. They disagree, however, about what those facts show, or if there's even enough out there to make a determination.

"I find it very, very frustrating that there is very little of what I would call peer-reviewed, hard science on either side," said Kevin Millar, a Village of Owego trustee and a member of [NewYork Residents Against Drilling](#). "I just try to look for what I would consider the most objective, verifiable science on it, and to look for something that isn't skewed by industry or, for lack of a better word, the anti-gas-drilling movement, is hard."

Both Siegel and Dan Fitzsimmons,

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of New York, said a main source of information is governmental websites and research. New York is set to release a second draft of its Supplemental Generic **Environmental** Impact Statement this summer, which is meant to set forth permitting guidelines and assess the environmental issues associated with high-volume hydrofracking.

Fitzsimmons also pointed to the **Pennsylvania** Department of Environmental Protection and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, both of which have pages on their websites dedicated to hydrofracking.

"They're some of the best places to go to really get the facts of what you need to get," Fitzsimmons said. "You put everything together and you look at it, and then you compare and make determinations."

But some of the information from the government has its detractors, too. For example, a 2004 **EPA** study on fracking found that it poses "little or no threat" to drinking water, but has been widely panned for what some see as a strong influence from the gas industry.

Some of the leading academic studies have been criticized for their source of **funding**. The Cornell report, for example, was partially funded by The Park Foundation, which has lobbied against gas drilling. A Pennsylvania State University study -- which was cited in New York's first draft SGEIS -- touted the Marcellus Shale's job-creating potential, but was supported

an industry group.

Siegel said he had been close to obtaining funding from a Texas university for a study on hydrofracking, but it fell through because the school, which is considered by most to be pro-gas, decided the final results would be seen as tainted.

"Advocates and activists on both sides will go to any ends to discredit the **quality** of research that comes out," Siegel said. "A very typical type of that approach is ... guilt by acquaintance."

Millar said the instant debunking of reports and opinions isn't positive.

"I think it's probably not a good thing, but it's unavoidable," he said. "What kind of amazes me is that people look at the same facts, science, data and come up with two opposite conclusions all of the time."