

Hydraulic fracturing still under attack



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Editor-OGFJ

At the risk of piling on, I want to add my voice to something the Independent Petroleum Association of America has been saying for some time now – there is no known risk to using hydraulic fracturing to complete wells, particularly those in resource plays such as the Marcellus shale in the eastern United States. The fracturing usually occurs well below the water table, and the chemicals used in the fracturing process represent a tiny percentage of the fracturing fluid.

The IPAA and other expert sources in the petroleum industry and in academia have discussed fracturing openly and publicly for many years. Still, there are groups that insist that, somehow, hydraulic fracturing is contaminating our water supply without any evidence to support their claims.

It wouldn't be so bad if these were just a few contrarians; you can't please or satisfy everyone. However, some of these activists seem to make a living off putting out false information. Unfortunately, these anti-drilling groups have been successful in persuading the State of New York to decline to issue drilling permits in its portion of the Marcellus shale formation, one of the hottest natural gas resource plays in the last 30 years or more.

Other states have not been so timid. Pennsylvania, which has substantial acreage in the Marcellus shale, has been the beneficiary of serious tax and other revenue by allowing drilling activity, while New York, which presumably could use the revenue as well, has been left holding an empty bag.

A recent study by Penn State University states that drilling in the Marcellus in that state has the potential to create 98,000 jobs and to contribute \$14 billion to Pennsylvania's economy in 2010 alone. But perhaps New York, which gas producers say may have similar potential, thinks this is chump change and doesn't need the jobs.

Some of the incorrect information being touted as fact is not just aimed at hydraulic fracturing, but it targets oil and gas activity in general. For example, an organization based in Ithaca, NY, called Toxics Targeting Inc. recently claimed there have been "270 oil and gas spills in New York" over the past 30 years – data it claims to have derived from government sources.

Jeff Eshelman and Chris Tucker of Energy In Depth, an organization representing America's independent oil and gas producers, have attempted to counter misinformation coming from groups such as this.

Toxics Targeting says the alleged "spills" caused by oil and natural gas drilling have caused fires, explosions, home evacuations, polluted drinking water and have had a long-term impact on forests, streams, wetlands, ponds, and other waterways.

Closer examination of the data, say Eshelman and Tucker, shows that many of these spills were at commercial and industrial sites, private homes, car and truck accidents, and even spills at gas stations. The total number of spills related to oil and natural gas exploration or production is 161 – not 270. Of these, the total number of spills related to gas exploration or production is just 45. Over a 30-year period, this amounts to a total spill percentage of 0.0123% – a far cry from the allegation that natural gas exploration is responsible for hundreds of catastrophic spills over the past three decades.

Bruce Vincent, IPAA chairman, recently appeared on CNBC to set the record straight regarding hydraulic fracturing. He pointed out that the technique has been used for 60 years, is a key technology in unlocking shale gas resources, and "there's not a known case where it's contaminated fresh water aquifers, yet there continue to be mischaracterizations that this may have happened."

Even the Environmental Defense Fund's Jim Marston, who appeared with Vincent on the program, was forced to admit, "Well, I agree with Bruce that some of [the] problems we are seeing...are not related to fracing...Fracing per se is not something that we have to fear."

With respect to federal regulations over hydraulic fracturing, Marston said, "We're hoping that states will step up and really fulfill their responsibility. If so, we may not need federal regulations."

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