HYDROFRACKING

THE ISSUE: IN 30 SECONDS

Have you heard the recent debates about fracking in upstate New York? Hydraulic fracturing, or "hydrofracking", is a process through which natural gases are forced out of underground rock using chemicals. Though supporters of hydrofracking see it as a cheaper way to source natural gases (as well as create jobs in New York State), environmentalists are concerned with how this process affects toxicity levels in the surrounding land, water, and air.

THE ISSUE: AN OVERVIEW

Hydraulic fracturing, as used for natural gas extraction, is the process by which millions of gallons of water, frequently mixed with chemicals and proppants (small particles such as sand or synthetic beads), are forced down a well at an extremely high pressure in order to create/expand fractures and release gas from the rock formation in which it is trapped. (http://www.safewatermovement.org/what-is-hydrofracking/)

Volumes of toxic and potentially radioactive liquid waste byproducts are created in the hydrofracking process. Without proper storage, treatment, or disposal, these liquid byproducts may enter back into the soil or sources of drinking water. (www.environmentnewyork.org) Near drilling sites in Pennsylvania, tested water and air has been found to be contaminated, and nearly 1.3 billion gallons of wastewater, containing toxic chemicals, corrosive salts, and sometimes event radioactive particles have been generated.

Upstate New York, home to the Marcellus and Utica shale formations, has been targeted as a commercially viable option for hydraulic fracturing as a method to recover natural gas (methane) from these carbon-rich rock beds. Where these formations are located is also home to many of New York State's major drinking water sources, including those that supply Westchester and New York City. Though it may be taking place over a hundred miles away, environmental issues such as hydraulic fracturing can potentially affect millions of people all over New York State.

Though laws such as the *Safe Drinking Water Act, Clean Water Act*, and the *Superfund* pollution cleanup act have been passed in New York, effective lobbying by the oil and gas industry has led to key exemptions from these safeguards – leaving New Yorkers vulnerable to hydrofracking pollution and byproducts such as "flowback fluid" chemicals, production brine (5x saltier than sea water), and radioactivity due to shale exposure. (www.riverkeeper.org/blog/fracking/ & http://www.citizenscampaign.org/campaigns/hydro-fracking.asp#frack)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are the pros of hydraulic fracturing?

Those in support of hydrofracking note that the process helps the United States rely less on foreign sources of oil and natural gas, and without having to transport these goods, reduces our overall carbon emissions. They argue that hydraulic fracturing takes place nearly a mile underground (deep below sources of ground water), and that the additives used are also found in consumer products such as cosmetics and food flavorings. (www.hydraulicfracturing.com)

What are the cons of hydraulic fracturing?

Hydraulic fracturing, by forcing natural gases out from shale formations using chemicals, may disrupt the balance of minerals left behind. Toxic byproducts, often liquid, are difficult to treat or dispose of safely, making our groundwater susceptible to contamination. Though it may bring money and jobs to a community, it may make an area uninhabitable due to the effects of this method of drilling (noise, air, soil, and water pollution).

How can I get involved locally?

Riverkeeper has served for years as a source for advocates looking to get involved in protecting local sources of air and water from pollution, whether distributing petitions, lobbying for environmental protections, or sponsoring clean up days along the Hudson River.

THE NEED

New York State is one full of proud citizens and natural beauty. We may not all agree on whether hydrofracking is the right choice for our state, but we can agree that steps must be taken to protect our natural resources for future generations. This is an issue that has direct consequences on our present and future – both on our health and our economy.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Riverkeeper: www.riverkeeper.org

New Yorkers Against Fracking: http://nyagainstfracking.org/

Safe Water Movement: http://www.safewatermovement.org/

Environment New York: http://www.environmentnewyork.org/

Citizens Campaign – Hydrofracking: http://www.citizenscampaign.org/campaigns/hydro-fracking.asp#frack

Pro-Hydraulic Fracturing Facts: http://www.hydraulicfracturing.com/Pages/information.aspx

Anti-Hydrofracking Petition to Gov. Cuomo: http://bit.ly/13pTEwT

CONNECTIONS TO JUSTICE

Making a Choice: It is up to us to let our elected officials know where we, as citizens, stand on this issue. On one hand, hydraulic fracturing may create jobs and lessen our energy dependence on other states or nations. One must also take into account the serious potential risks to a landscape and the community within, as hydrofracking may upset a delicate natural balance.

Protecting the Environment: What is convenient now may cause unforeseen environmental circumstances down the line. When considering hydrofracking as a drilling method for natural gas, individuals and communities must take into account how their decisions now will affect future generations.

Your Vote Counts: The hydrofracking debate is a great example of how important it is to stay informed of not only national, but also state and local politics. Decisions like these, while they may seem geographically far off, can have a direct effect on costs of natural gas, as well as the protection of our air, water, and other natural resources.