

# No Fracking Way

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**In addition to poisoning our water, homes, and bodies, fracking is eroding the quality of life in rural America.**

Flames exploding from kitchen taps. Livestock dropping dead from tainted water. People in small towns noticing an unusual stench, experiencing acute headaches, and blacking out.

These aren't scenes from a horror movie. They're the increasingly common results of natural gas drilling throughout the United States.

Many state and federal lawmakers see natural gas as the answer to our nation's need for new energy sources. Yet extracting gas through a process called hydraulic fracturing — more commonly referred to as "fracking" — poses unacceptable risks to the American public. Fracking requires large quantities of water and a cocktail of toxic chemicals that have been shown to poison water resources in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

To date, at least 1,000 cases of water contamination have been documented near drilling sites around the country. In some cases, residents can no longer drink from their taps, and in at least one instance, a home near a fracking site exploded after a gas well leaked methane into its tap water.

Fracking can also compromise air quality. People in Dish, Texas, located near 11 natural gas compression stations, know this from firsthand experience. Residents there complained of headaches and blackouts, a strange odor in the air, and a sudden rash of blindness among their livestock. A private environmental consultant sampled air from Dish and found that it contained high levels of neurotoxins and carcinogens, including benzene.

The correlation between fracking and serious public health problems is further reinforced by studies conducted by the Endocrine Disruption Network, which found that 25 percent of fracking chemicals could cause cancer, and 40 to 50 percent could affect the nervous, immune, and cardiovascular systems.

In addition to poisoning our water, homes, and bodies, fracking is eroding the quality of life in rural America. New wells bring fleets of noisy, polluting trucks to small towns. Scenic vistas are replaced by fracking wells, harming tourism and recreation industries. In Wise County, Texas, properties with gas wells have lost 75 percent of their value. While companies promise minimal impacts, the process often devastates farming operations when fracking fluids poison water supplies, sometimes even killing livestock.

Yet despite these problems, the United States is currently experiencing a boom in natural gas production, drilling into rock that is only now accessible thanks to so-called

innovations within the industry. Between 2000 and 2010, fracked shale gas increased from 1 percent to 20 percent of the domestically drilled natural gas supply.

The natural gas industry's influence has fueled much of this growth. Between 2005 and 2010, the largest natural gas producers and two trade associations spent more than \$370 million lobbying on behalf of industry interests.

Such unchecked influence has allowed the natural gas industry to expand while doing little to protect consumers from its effects. Fracking is exempt from regulation under the Safe Drinking Water Act, and companies are not legally required to disclose the chemicals used in fracking operations, claiming them as proprietary "trade secrets."

In the absence of strong federal leadership, it's up to state and local governments to protect their residents. Last year, New York State passed a six-month moratorium on fracking. In late May, Eric Schneiderman, the state's Attorney General, launched a lawsuit against the federal government for not fully assessing the environmental impacts of proposed fracking operations along the Delaware River, which supplies drinking water for 15 million Americans. To date, at least 44 municipalities across the country have passed measures to ban fracking.

Such developments point to a public backlash against this dirty, polluting process, but federal government involvement is essential too. President Barack Obama should institute a national ban on natural gas fracking. Doing so would protect public health and our essential resources, sending the message that our communities are more important than the interests of the big oil and gas companies.

The [report](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org), *The Case for a Ban on Gas Fracking*, is available at <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org>



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