

Frack, Baby, Frack! (Update)

by Theodore Voneida

Natural gas (methane) located in the Marcellus and Devonian shale formations lie 5,000-10,000 feet below ground in Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio and Kentucky. In order to access this gas, wells are now being drilled by a process called hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. This process involves very high pressure injections of millions of gallons of water, sand, and various toxic chemicals into the shale formations in order to "fracture" the shale and cause the gas to flow out. According to an article published by Clean Water Action on September 9, 2010, communities nationwide are concerned about the impact of these potentially toxic fluids on both human and domestic animal drinking water sources. Congress, responding to the efforts of then Vice President Dick Cheney, exempted most fracking projects from the Safe Drinking Water Act in 2005. This exemption is commonly referred to as the Halliburton Loophole.

In September 2010, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency asked major oil and gas services companies to disclose information about chemicals and procedures used in fracking. The EPA action is believed to be significant because it will help ensure that water quality and the health of people who rely on that water are not damaged by natural gas exploration and development. Some, but not all, companies have complied with the EPA request, which is beginning to supply state and federal regulators with the information necessary to determine the potential health risks of fracking operations.

There is particular concern in Northeast Ohio at the moment, for there has been a recent surge in gas company efforts to obtain drilling rights in the area before more stringent fracking regulations are imposed. Gas company "landmen" often urge people to sign leases quickly, without their first contacting an attorney who is experienced in these matters. Many who have agreed to the request have suffered severe consequences. Contacting a knowledgeable attorney before signing a lease is of utmost importance. Efforts are now under way in the Ohio Legislature to allow drilling in Ohio State Parks.

Clean Water Action is a 1.2-million member organization dedicated to protecting the environmental health, economic well-being and community quality of life. Other excellent sources of information on fracking include [NEOGAP](#), [Earth Works](#) and [ProPublica](#), and the films "Gasland" (nominated for an Academy Award as best documentary film of 2010) and "Split Estates."