



FRACKING

OCCUCARD #13



EXPOSING AND OPPOSING THE CORPORATE STATE

H **draulic fracturing**, or “fracking,” is the process of pumping large quantities of water, sand and chemicals deep underground at high pressures in order to release trapped natural gas from tight rock formations, especially shale. Over the last decade, advances in fracking methods, such as horizontal drilling, have led to a dramatic increase in U.S. shale gas production. Tens of thousands of fracking wells now operate in twenty states, producing over seven trillion cubic feet of shale gas per year, or 25% of the total U.S. supply of natural gas.

While fracking has been a boon for the oil and gas industry, it has been devastating to the environment. Each well is injected with millions of gallons of fresh water containing a mix of toxic chemicals. Up to 50% of this fluid returns to the surface, having been further contaminated with methane and other hazardous substances released from the shale, including the radioactive element radium-226. Much of this toxic wastewater leaks into nearby groundwater, polluting streams and aquifers. (In some cases the methane contamination is so high that residents living near fracking wells are able to light their drinking water on fire.) The rest of the wastewater is either injected into empty, underground rock formations or shipped off to conventional water treatment facilities. However, these facilities are not equipped to handle radioactive material or other types of contaminants found in fracking wastewater, which they simply discharge into rivers and streams. And questions remain as to whether underground rock formations, many of which have been damaged by fracking, can permanently contain the wastewater. Furthermore, the USGS confirmed in May, 2012 what many people had already suspected, that the underground disposal of fracking wastewater has been responsible for the twenty-fold increase in earthquakes seen in regions where fracking takes place.

Fracking wells also emit hazardous air pollutants, including benzene and toluene, that can cause cancer and other serious health effects. Residents of Dish, TX who live near fracking wells have reported headaches and blackouts, and many of their horses have gone blind or developed other neurological impairments. In six Texas counties with intensive shale gas

development, asthma rates are three times higher than the Texas average. And in Wyoming, fracking has caused ground-level ozone pollution in some residential areas to exceed amounts recorded in Los Angeles. Fracking also releases large quantities of methane, a greenhouse gas 20 times more potent than CO₂, giving shale gas a larger global warming footprint than oil.

While the oil and gas industry touts fracking as a “game changer” that will lead the U.S. to “energy independence,” these claims have been widely criticized as false and intentionally misleading. High drilling costs and rapid decline rates of fracked wells suggest shale gas is uneconomical in the long run, and hundreds of internal industry documents and emails leaked to the *New York Times* describe shale gas development as a “Ponzi scheme reminiscent of Enron,” where “flipping land leases” and “conning investors” is more profitable than the actual gas.

Despite the environmental consequences, congress passed the Energy Policy Act of 2005, which exempted the fracking industry from virtually all environmental regulations, including the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and Safe Drinking Water Act. In May, 2012 the EPA outraged independent scientists and residents of Dimock, PA, by declaring the town's water safe to drink even though it contained unsafe levels of arsenic, barium and other contaminants. And in June, 2012 the New York department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) secretly allowed fracking industry lobbyists to help draft the state's proposed fracking legislation, watering it down in the interest of industry profits. This criminal collusion demands a broad-based movement of **education**, **protest** and **civil disobedience** to put pressure on the government to ban fracking and invest in a safe and renewable energy infrastructure.

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