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The Fracas Over Fracking: TPPF Scholar Authors Lead Energy Story for National Review's Special Energy Issue

Jun 07, 2011

TPPF's Kathleen Hartnett White examines the low risks and high rewards of hydraulic fracturing or "fracking"

AUSTIN, Texas, June 7, 2011 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- "The U.S. has far more energy resources than any other country, yet no other country so limits and blocks access to its own energy supply," writes Kathleen Hartnett White in the latest issue of *National Review*.

(Logo: <http://photos.prnewswire.com/prnh/20100713/TPPFLOGO>)

Ms. White, Director of the Armstrong Center for Energy and Environment at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, says a major boom in domestic oil and gas production is under way, brought about by breakthrough refinements of a 1940s technology known as hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking." For just one example, "[t]he [Energy Information Administration] believes that natural gas in the Marcellus formation of New York, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia contains more BTUs of energy than do the oil reserves of Saudi Arabia," writes Ms. White.

Hydraulic fracturing involves pumping water, sand, and some trace chemicals under high pressure into a completed wellbore to create fissures in relatively impermeable geologic formations such as shale. These fissures allow oil or natural gas to flow into the well. The sand props the fissures open, preventing the resealing of pathways. Combined with horizontal drilling at depths of one to more than two miles below the earth's surface, hydraulic fracturing has unlocked vast stores of natural gas.

However, a fierce anti-fracking movement is growing. As Ms. White explains in her article, though the list of environmental perils attributed to hydraulic fracturing is long, with the exception of groundwater depletion, no causal connection between hydraulic fracturing and environmental problems has been demonstrated. In fact:

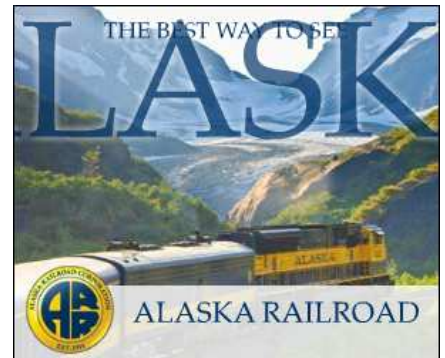
- The Society of Petroleum Engineers estimates that over the last 60 years, more than one million oil and gas wells in the U.S. have used hydraulic fracturing. During this time, it has never been connected to groundwater contamination.
- Air emissions from drilling sites have been a concern in the Barnett shale area, but studies by the Texas Department of Health and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality have confirmed that the emissions do not exceed levels protective of human health.
- Though the extremely high volume of water used in the fracking process is of some concern – quantities vary but 2 million gallons per day appears to be an average use – methods are now under way to reduce freshwater use by recycling wastewater after treatment.

Ms. White writes, "[W]hen deciding on a policy on fracking, we should not wait for a congressionally mandated EPA report on the impacts of hydraulic fracturing on drinking water, due in 2012. For one thing, it will be an inside job from the EPA; the study's review panel excludes anyone with professional expertise in current industry practices or the technology of hydraulic fracturing.

"If fracking is delayed or discontinued, massive resources will remain untapped, hundreds of thousands of jobs will not be created, and billions of dollars of potential federal, state, and local tax revenues will be lost. Vast stores remain, and almost all new wells will need hydraulic fracturing."

Read the rest of the article [here](#) (subscription only).

National Review is America's most widely-read and influential magazine for conservative news, commentary, and opinion. It is available on newsstands nationwide.



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