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Hydraulic Fracturing: Yay or Nay?

brooke reaves

The issue of hydraulic fracturing—more commonly known as “fracking”—is one that has plagued our country, and other nations around the globe, for many decades. The conversation of its advantages versus its disadvantages has been thrashed out time and again among politicians and environmentalists, and this discussion will continue unless a solid decision is reached, and a better, sustainable alternative is discovered and subsequently used. The benefits of hydraulic fracturing are equalled by its drawbacks, such as its horrific environmental impact.

Supporters of hydraulic fracturing point out its multiple and significant advantages. For example, fracking makes natural gas and oil relatively easy to obtain, and this shows fracking’s “superiority” to other technologies in the industry used to obtain equivalent petroleum products. A particularly important aspect of hydraulic fracturing is that it decreases the United States’ dependence on foreign energy supplies. This, in turn, causes the cost of these energy supplies to decrease dramatically. According to a [Yale study group](#), “not even inflated costs associated with unrealistically high incidences of pollution can come close to balancing the societal benefits of the shale gas boom.” America has [surpassed](#) Russia and even Saudi Arabia in the production of oil and natural gas, and this will probably lead to high export revenues from the sale of these products to other nations.

Another benefit of hydraulic fracturing is that it can be successful in extracting oil and natural gas from the



more than six decades, and the technique is rapidly evolving. Following the trends of technology, eventual and inevitable innovations in hydraulic fracturing will lead to a decrease in its environmental impact.

The greatest advantage of hydraulic fracturing is its beneficial impact on the economy. It provides millions of jobs in the United States alone, with an increase every year. According to the American Petroleum Institute, “Energy from fracking and related chemical activity contributed almost \$284 billion to GDP” while “abundant, affordable energy from shale has helped fuel a U.S. manufacturing resurgence.”

Overall, the multiple benefits of hydraulic fracturing are no insignificant factor in an informed debate in support of or against it. No one would deny the societal benefits of the shale gas boom—that’s a truism. However, the main question of concern is whether or not these benefits outweigh the disadvantages, or if in fact the disadvantages outweigh the obvious benefits. According to EARTHWORKS, there are nine basic issues concerning the use of hydraulic fracturing. These nine impacts are water use, sand and proppants, toxic chemicals, health concerns, surface water and soil contamination, groundwater contamination, air quality, waste disposal, and chemical disclosure.

Also according to EARTHWORKS, one to eight million gallons of water are necessary to complete each fracking job. The transportation of this water requires more than a thousand truck trips, contributes to pollution, and disrupts local communities too. A mixture of this water, along with proppants and chemicals, is used to fracture a rock or coal formation. However, more than ninety percent of these fracking fluids may remain underground and proceed to harm the environment. Sand and proppants are used in fracking, and frac sand mines have their own environmental impacts, not to mention contribute to health safety problems associated with crystalline silica.

Approximately 40,000 gallons of chemicals are used per fracking job and include up to 600 different chemicals. The toxic chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing are dangerous to both humans and wildlife and many cause cancer. Small quantities of these toxic chemicals can contaminate millions of gallons of water, and affect millions of lives by causing disastrous health concerns.

The disruption of local communities due to the contamination of their drinking water should be a pressing moral concern. Fracking causes a negative production externality for society. The people who are not involved in the fracking industry are the ones who face its consequences and have to live without clean water, or even have to move to a new community in order to have clean drinking water, a basic human necessity.

To me, the human consequences of fracking--the disruption or destruction of people’s livelihoods--equal or outweigh its environmental impacts. Spills of these fracking chemicals and wastes can contaminate surface

water and soil and, in turn, adversely affect all aspects of the natural environment in a specific area. The chemicals and water not recovered can contaminate groundwater sources. As drilling increases, air quality decreases as well.

Waste disposal is also a huge challenge. Wastewater injection wells have been connected to earthquakes. Furthermore, many companies refuse to disclose the chemicals used in their specific hydraulic fracturing processes, and some states, such as Texas, have laws that shield them from being required to disclose.

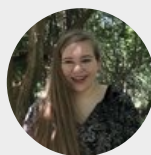
All of these impacts add up to one conclusion: There are more than two sides--those “for” versus those “against”--to fracking. There are many benefits to hydraulic fracturing; however, as of now, this process does harmfully impact the environment and these impacts create a substantial adversary that is pressing for our environmental policy. It is conclusive that the most important side to this discussion is that of our posterity. Our posterity will have to deal with the gradual build-up of these horrendous effects and will have to find a solution, unless we are proactive.

Thus, we need to use the opportunities provided by the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) and other pipelines and the money from these endeavors to fund exploration into energy alternatives that are actually sustainable. This is a temporary solution. We need a permanent one.

Of course, the DAPL issue is complicated further due to its conflict with Native American lands, and its recent leak. If there had not been that enduring and heated conflict with the Native American tribes, I would support the pipeline as a solution for today, but not for our future.

Environment

[environment](#), [fracking](#), [hydraulic fracturing](#)



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