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What is fracking?

Hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking" as it is more commonly known, is just one small method of the broader process of unconventional development of oil and natural gas. Fracking is a proven drilling technology used for extracting oil, natural gas, geothermal energy, or water from deep underground. Fracking has been safely used in the United States since 1947. More than 1.7 million U.S. wells have been completed using the fracking process, producing more than seven billion barrels of oil and 600 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

Put simply, hydraulic fracturing is the process of injecting liquid and materials at high pressure to create small fractures within tight shale formations to stimulate the production and safely extract energy from an underground well after the drilling has ended and the rig and derrick are removed from the site. The process takes about three to five days, on average, to complete from start to finish. Once the fracturing operation is finished, the well is considered "completed" and is now ready to safely produce American oil or natural gas for years, even decades, to come.

Fracking is a uniquely American success story that has provided immense benefits around the nation. By safely unlocking America's abundant natural resources, fracking has created millions of American jobs, reduced energy prices, brought cleaner air by significantly reducing U.S. greenhouse gas emissions to 25-year-lows, strengthened our national security, and transformed the United States into a global energy superpower.

Facts About Fracking

How has fracking impacted U.S. oil and natural gas production?

In roughly a decade's time, advances in fracking technology have reversed the United States' trajectory from that of energy scarcity to being "the undisputed leader of oil and gas production worldwide," according to International Energy Agency Executive Director Fatih Birol. From 2007 to 2016, annual U.S. oil production increased 75 percent, while natural gas production increased 39 percent, thanks to the advancements in horizontal drilling and fracking technology.

How many American jobs has fracking created?

Millions. A 2015 Harvard Business School/Boston Consulting Group analysis estimates that shale development created roughly 2.7 million U.S. jobs in the first decade of the shale revolution. A 2013 study, commissioned by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, projected fracking will create a total of 3.5 million U.S. jobs by 2035. A separate 2017 American Petroleum Institute (API) report found that the oil and natural gas industry supports 10.3 million jobs in the U.S. — a 500,000 increase since 2011 — and projects the industry will support an additional 1.9 million jobs by 2035.

Is fracking a threat to public health?

No. In fact, there is ample evidence that increased natural gas use — made possible by fracking — has improved public health by dramatically improving air quality in recent years. This is not to say there are no risks, but the full body of research on this issue shows that those risks are manageable.

Several state departments of environmental protection have also installed air monitors at well sites and found that emissions during oil and natural gas development do not exceed public health thresholds. For example, the Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment released a 2017 report that found a "low risk of harmful health effects from combined exposure to all substances during oil and gas development." In contrast, many of the most headline-grabbing studies linking fracking to health issues have been plagued by questionable methodologies and contradictory results. Visit EIDHealth.org for more information.

Does fracking threaten groundwater?

No. And you don't have to take our word for it. No fewer than two dozen scientific studies have concluded that fracking does not pose a major threat to groundwater. Most notably, a landmark 2016 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency study concluded that, "[H]ydraulic fracturing operations are unlikely to generate sufficient pressure to drive fluids into shallow drinking water zones." The EPA reached this conclusion even after expanding the definition of fracking to include a wide range of other oilfield activities, demonstrating the safety of the entire development process.

Does fracking cause earthquakes?

Very rarely. Although induced seismicity (particularly in Oklahoma) has made headlines in recent years, earthquakes attributable to the actual fracking process are exceedingly rare and generally below the magnitude that people can actually feel. Induced earthquakes are more commonly linked to wastewater injection — a completely separate process from fracking.
The U.S. Geological Survey maintains a useful myths and misconceptions page regarding induced seismicity. According to the USGS: "Fracking is NOT causing most of the induced earthquakes." The USGS also notes: "Wastewater disposal is the primary cause of the recent increase in earthquakes in the central United States."

BLM Hydraulic Fracturing Rule

The Obama administration's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released on March 20, 2015 its final rule regulating hydraulic fracturing activities on federal and Indian lands. As it was written, this precedent-setting regulation would be difficult and costly for small- and medium-sized businesses to comply with and would likely discourage U.S. investment and job creation in the West. IPAA and Western Energy Alliance immediately challenged the BLM hydraulic fracturing rule in the U.S. District Court of Wyoming, characterizing the federal government's rulemaking as unsubstantiated and duplicative of states' efforts to effectively regulate hydraulic fracturing operations. Soon after, the states of Colorado, Wyoming, North Dakota, and Utah, and the Ute Indian Tribe joined the legal challenge. States have successfully regulated more than 1.2 million hydraulic fracturing operations for 70 years and many states have recently strengthened their regulations as production has increased and technology has improved. The 2015 nationwide fracking rule is unnecessary and would add another layer of burden for America's independent oil and natural gas producers already struggling to navigate the complex and confusing regulatory program governing federal lands.

On September 30, 2015, a judge for the U.S. District Court of Wyoming granted IPAA and Western Energy Alliance's motion for a preliminary injunction of the rule, stating, "Congress has not authorized or delegated to the BLM authority to regulate hydraulic fracturing and, under our constitutional structure, it is only through Congressional action that the BLM can acquire this authority." On June 21, 2016, shortly after the preliminary injunction appeal case was fully briefed, the District Court judge struck down the BLM final rule. The judge agreed with industry that BLM does not have the congressional authority to regulate hydraulic fracturing on federal lands.

As expected, the Obama administration and environmental parties on June 30, 2016 filed an appeal to the District Court's ruling with the U.S. Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals. In September 2017, the Tenth Circuit Court dismissed the case, protecting producers from the business uncertainty of having to potentially comply with a regulation that is certain to be rewritten by the Trump administration. On December 29, 2017, President Trump's BLM published a repeal of the Obama-era hydraulic fracturing rule, which took immediate effect and ended the Tenth Circuit Court appellate case. On January 28, 2018, the state of California as well as the Sierra Club sued the BLM over the repeal of the 2015 rule in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California. IPAA and Western Energy Alliance have filed for intervention on behalf of the federal government as well as filed a motion for venue transfer back to Wyoming.

Accessed 18th January 2023: https://www.ipaa.org/fracking/

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