

COMMITTEE ON
**SCIENCE, SPACE, AND
TECHNOLOGY**
CHAIRMAN LAMAR SMITH



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Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)

Hydraulic Fracturing: Banning Proven Technologies on Possibilities Instead of Probabilities

Chairman Smith: The combination of hydraulic fracturing and directional drilling, called “fracking,” is arguably one of the most significant technological advancements in the history of the oil and gas industry.

This technological breakthrough has helped create hundreds of thousands of jobs, been the catalyst for a resurging manufacturing sector, and has enabled our nation to become more energy independent. But as with any type of technological progress from oil and gas development, any risks must be evaluated carefully with the use of verifiable science.

Unfortunately, opponents of hydraulic fracturing make claims based on the possibility and not the probability of associated risks. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has used this agenda-driven approach to wrongly assert a connection between hydraulic fracturing and ground water contamination.

For example, in Parker County, Texas, the EPA issued an “unprecedented” order that halted natural gas development only to have the Texas Railroad Commission investigate and find the EPA was wrong. In Pavillion, Wyoming, the EPA released a draft report that claimed hydraulic fracturing caused water contamination. However, it was later discovered that the report had several glaring weaknesses.

Among them, the report failed to take into account naturally occurring natural gas, it was not peer reviewed, it involved poor sampling and lacked data transparency. The EPA was forced to abandon its investigation. Then in Dimock, Pennsylvania, the EPA reinitiated an investigation into ground water contamination after it had at first agreed there was no contamination. Seven months later, the EPA indicated that oil and gas development was not the cause of the contamination. It appears that the decision to reinitiate the investigation was based on political pressure from activists who oppose hydraulic fracturing.

It is incredible, given their track record, that the EPA is now working on another large study to suggest a causal connection between hydraulic fracturing and ground water contamination. Their refusal to accept good science knows no bounds, which is why we should be suspect of other findings by the EPA. Their political agenda drives their science agenda.

Perhaps most troubling is that EPA’s study of fracking does not include a risk assessment in their analysis. This means the study will be focused on possible problems with hydraulic fracturing rather than what is likely or probable. The mere possibility that something may occur will do little to help regulators evaluate the overall process.

The science overwhelmingly shows that hydraulic fracturing can be done in an environmentally safe manner. Even the Administration agrees and has repeatedly said that potential risks can be avoided through modern technologies based on sound science.

President Obama has stated that “we should strengthen our position as the top natural gas producer.” And that the natural gas boom, made possible by hydraulic fracturing, has led to “greater energy independence, [and] we need to encourage that.”

In fact, even the current Administrator of the EPA said, “There's nothing inherently dangerous in fracking that sound engineering practices can't accomplish.” Then why does the EPA repeatedly and publicly begin with the premise that hydraulic fracturing causes water contamination only to be forced to retract their premise after the claims are put to scientific scrutiny?

Meanwhile, the allegations make headlines; the retractions are footnotes.

The EPA's bias against fracking is the opposite of the accepted scientific method. Hydraulic fracturing is a proven, safe technology that has made America an energy leader. Yet there are still those that believe that regardless of the science, the process should be banned.

Activists have spread misinformation about the science in an attempt to convince Americans that there is no way fracking can be done safely. The Administration relies on questionable studies and reports that are paid for, peer-reviewed by, and disseminated by a network of environmentalists with an ideological agenda.

Using scare tactics to impede the development of oil and gas will cost our communities jobs, our states revenue, and will force us to increase our dependence on foreign oil. Safe domestic natural gas production has benefited the environment, the economy and the hardworking families who now enjoy reduced energy costs.

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