GSA CRITICAL ISSUE: HYDRAULIC FRACTURING

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INTRODUCTION

Hydraulic fracturing is a technological process used in the development of natural gas and oil resources. Used commercially since the 1940s, it has only relatively recently been used to extract gas and oil from shales and other tight reserves (Fig. 1). Development of lower cost, more effective fracturing fluids [1], with horizontal well drilling and subsurface imaging, created a technological breakthrough that is largely responsible for the increase in domestic production of shale gas in the last few years and longer for tight gas (Fig. 2) [2, 3]. Continued use of hydraulic fracturing can be expected, given projections of future shale gas and tight gas contributions to total U.S. gas production (Fig. 3), unless it is banned or replaced by other technologies [4, 5]. Hydraulic fracturing has expanded oil and gas development to new areas of the United States (Fig. 4) and internationally, including Canada, Australia, and Argentina [6, 42, 43]. In contrast, some governments have limited the use of hydraulic fracturing. For example, South Africa only recently lifted a moratorium, New York State has a moratorium, and France has banned its use [7, 8, 9].

Figure 1: Drilling into Marcellus Shale (Google images).

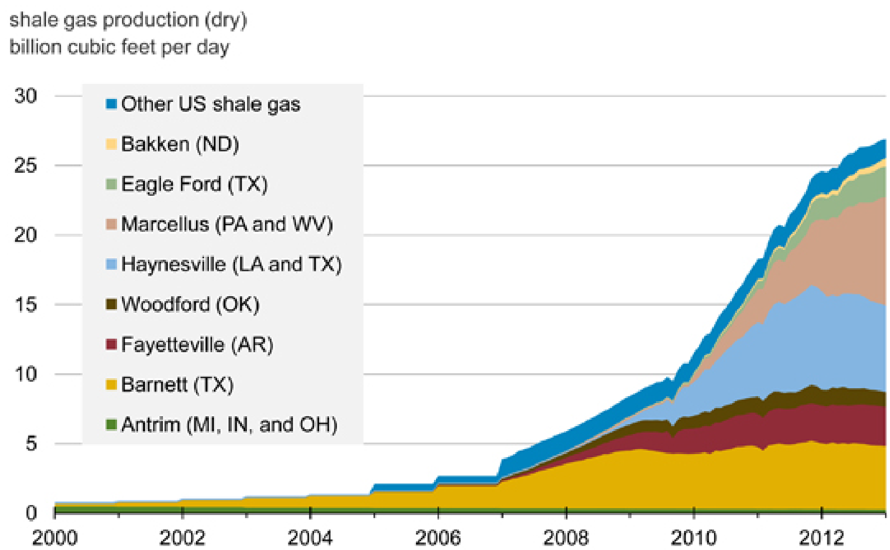

Figure 2: Estimated withdrawals of shale gas as of January 2013. Energy Information Administration, Dec. 2012.

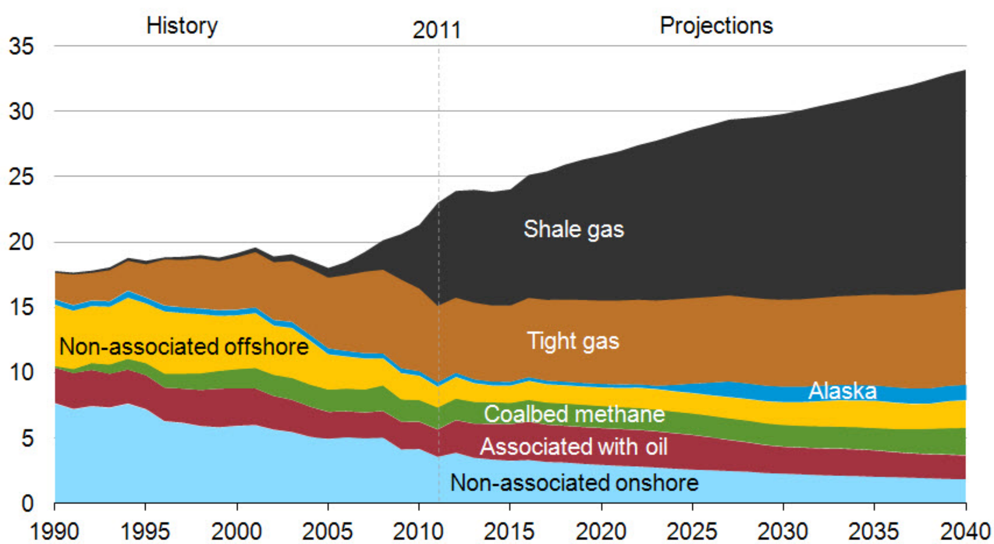

Figure 3: U.S. dry natural gas production, trillion cubic feet. Energy Information Administration Dec. 2012.

Hydraulic fracturing has become a highly contentious public policy issue because of concerns about the environmental and health effects of its use. What are the environmental risks of hydraulic fracturing? What are the health risks from the chemicals injected into the ground? Will it take away water needed for food production and cities? Does it trigger earthquakes? Does expansion of this technology for fossil fuels mean a decreased commitment to renewable energy technology?

In many cases it is unclear whether concerns raised relate specifically to hydraulic fracturing, or more generally to the development of unconventional petroleum resources, or to other aspects related to all oil and gas development. While many of these concerns relate to policy, economics, and social areas that are outside the scope of this paper, the geoscience community is well suited to address some of the technical questions being asked.

The Geological Society of America does not have a position statement on hydraulic fracturing. This critical issue paper is written as a primer for the general public, journalists, and even resource professionals who may have difficulty finding objective, credible information about hydraulic fracturing of shales and other unconventional sources and related environmental concerns. This primer is also intended to furnish members of The Geological Society of America with a concise, clear, non-technical discussion of the process and the issue, as a reference they can provide to non-geologists to inform conversations on the topic.

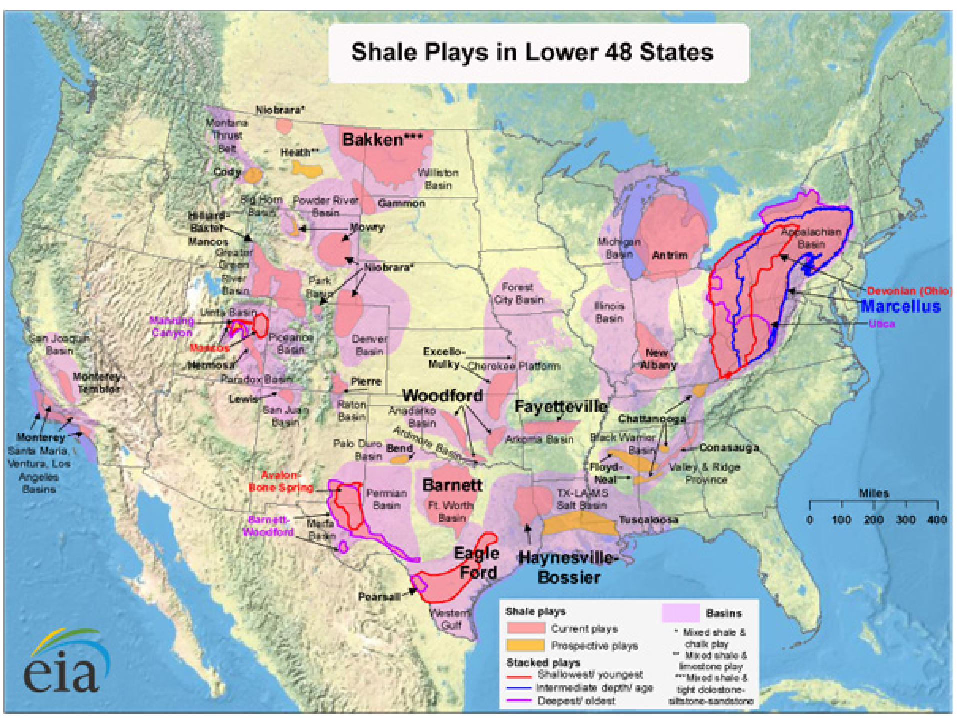

Figure 4: Shale gas locations in the United States. Energy Information Administration, 5 Dec. 2012.

HYDRAULIC FRACTURING DEFINED

Oil and natural gas, which are hydrocarbons, reside in the pore spaces between grains of rock (called reservoir rock) in the subsurface. If geologic conditions are favorable, hydrocarbons flow freely from reservoir rocks to oil and gas wells. Production from these rocks is traditionally referred to as "conventional" hydrocarbon reserves. However, in some rocks, hydrocarbons are trapped within microscopic pore space in the rock. This is especially true in fine-grained rocks, such as shales, that have very small and poorly connected pore spaces not conducive to the free flow of liquid or gas (called low-permeability rocks)(Fig. 5). Natural gas that occurs in the pore spaces of shale is called shale gas. Some sandstones and carbonate rocks (such as limestone) with similarly low permeability are often referred to as "tight" formations. Geologists have long known that large quantities of oil and natural gas occur in formations like these (often referred to as tight oil or gas). Hydraulic fracturing can enhance the permeability of these rocks to a point where oil and gas can economically be extracted.

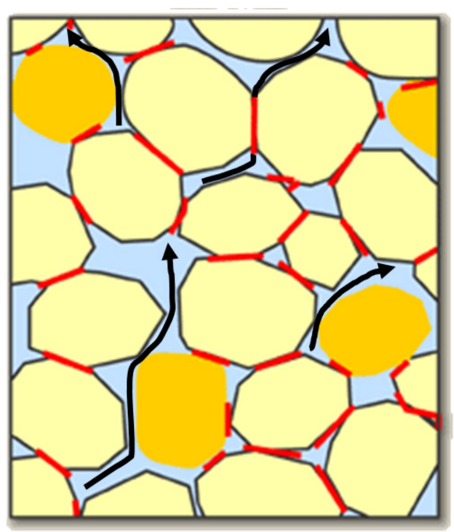

Figure 5: Schematic of rock grains, pore space, and permeability. The interconnection of spaces between grains allows flow of gas or other fluid. Modified from Bureau of Economic Geology, The University of Texas.

Hydraulic fracturing (also known colloquially as "fracing" or "fracking") is a technique used to stimulate production of oil and gas after a well has been drilled [10]. It consists of injecting a mixture of water, sand, and chemical additives through a well drilled into an oil- or gas-bearing rock formation under high but controlled pressure. The process is designed to create small cracks within (and thus fracture) the formation and propagate those fractures to a desired distance from the well bore by controlling the rate, pressure, and timing of fluid injection. Engineers use pressure and fluid characteristics to restrict those fractures to the target reservoir rock, typically limited to a distance of a few hundred feet from the well. Proppant (sand or sometimes other inert material, such as ceramic beads) is carried into the newly formed fractures to keep them open after the pressure is released and allow fluids (generally hydrocarbons) that were trapped in the rock to flow through the fractures more efficiently. Some of the water/chemical/proppant fracturing fluids remain in the subsurface. Some of this fluid mixture (called "flowback water") returns to the surface, often along with oil, natural gas, and water that was already naturally present in the producing formation. This natural formation water is known as "produced water" and much of it is highly saline [11]. The hydrocarbons are separated from the returned fluid at the surface, and the flowback and produced water is collected in tanks or lined pits. Handling and disposal of returned fluids has historically been part of all oil and gas drilling operations, and is not exclusive to wells that have been hydraulically fractured. Similarly, proper well construction is an essential component of all well-completion operations, not only wells that involve hydraulic fracturing. Well completion and construction, along with fluid disposal, are inherent to oil and gas development, and are specifically addressed in this paper because of concern about them and their relationship to hydraulic fracturing.

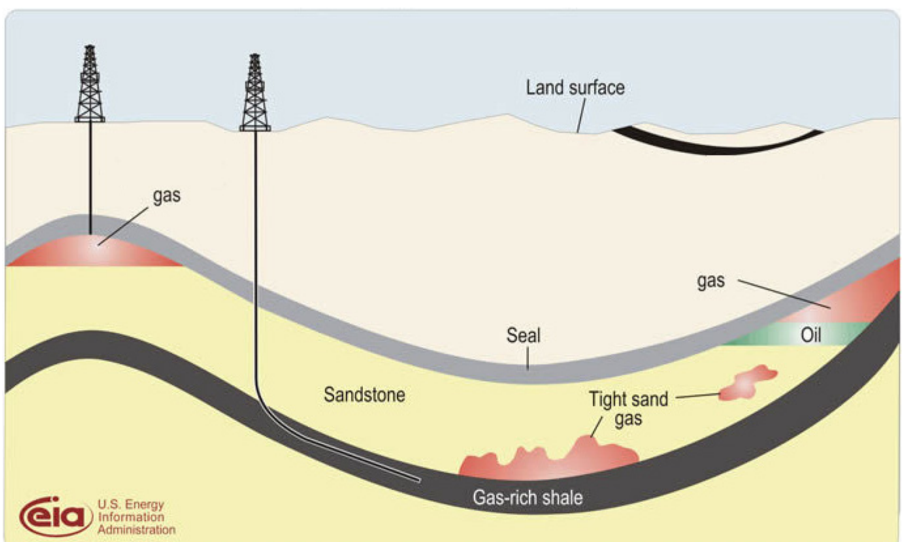

Figure 6: Schematic geology of natural gas resources. Modified from U.S. Energy Information Administration and modified from U.S. Geological Survey Fact Sheet 0113-01.

Hydraulic fracturing of shales and other tight rocks is generally through horizontal or directional (non-vertical) drilled wells (Fig. 6), which typically involve longer boreholes and much greater volumes of water than conventional oil and gas wells.

HYDRAULIC FRACTURING'S HISTORY AND ROLE IN ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

Hydraulic fracturing has been commercially applied since the 1940s (Fig. 7). Over a million wells in the U.S. have been subjected to hydraulic fracturing, most of them traditional vertical oil and gas wells [12]. Hydraulic fracturing became even more important in the 1990s, when improved technology allowed its application to horizontal wells in developing tight gas and oil reserves, particularly for shales[3]. The technology combination of hydraulic fracturing, the chemistry of the fracturing fluid, and the use of horizontal wells is rapidly evolving. Traditional wells are drilled vertically (usually several thousand feet) and penetrate a few tens or hundreds of feet of the reservoir rock. Horizontal wells start vertically, but then at a kickoff point are directed laterally (or horizontally) within the reservoir rock. The horizontal legs of these wells may extend as much as 10,000 feet through a reservoir rock, thus accessing a far greater volume of the reservoir than a traditional vertical well that only taps one vertical thickness of the reservoir rock. This replaces the need for multiple, vertical wells spaced closely on the land surface to tap the same reservoir volume. Because multiple wells can be drilled from one horizontal well pad, this further decreases the total amount of land needed for the drilling platform and subsequent surface production equipment, although a horizontal well pad is typically much larger than a traditional vertical well pad. Because horizontal wells have both a vertical and a horizontal leg, and more contact with the reservoir rock than a traditional vertical well, horizontal wells typically use a larger volume of water than traditional vertical wells [6, 12]. In a horizontal well, hydraulic fracturing usually occurs sequentially in several stages along the horizontal well bore (these are sometimes referred to as "staged treatments"), generally in 10 to 15 pumping intervals, and sometimes as many as 50 [13]. Hydraulic fracturing of each stage may take from 20 minutes to four hours to complete [14].

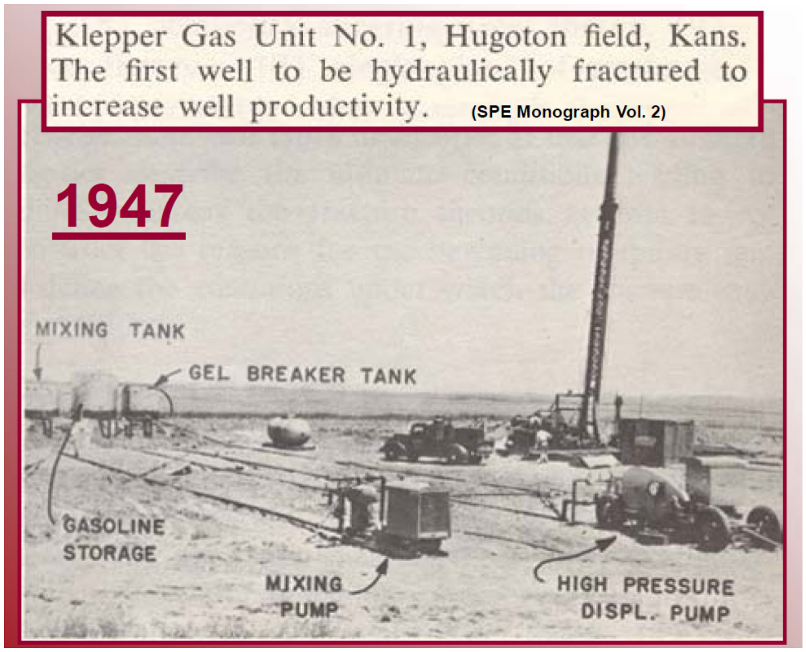

Figure 7: Photo of first hydraulically fractured well, from Howard, G.C., and Fast, C.R., 1970 [41]. Reproduced with permission of SPE; further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In the past three decades, hydraulic fracturing has been increasingly used in formations that were known to be rich in natural gas that was locked so tightly in the rock that it was technologically and economically difficult to produce [3]. The application of hydraulic fracturing to tight sands breathed new life into old fields and allowed production of new fields. Then the development of shale opened up whole new areas to development, including the Marcellus Shale in the eastern U.S., the Barnett Shale in Texas, and the Fayetteville Shale in Arkansas (Figs. 4, 8). The rise in production of natural gas from these and other shale plays was dramatic, to the point that natural gas prices have dropped and become more stable. Natural gas has become a major source of electrical power, and the U.S. may become a net natural gas exporter [15].

While hydraulic fracturing has had a huge impact on natural gas production, these same techniques have also been applied to oil fields [13, 15] and have led to increased production from formations such as the Bakken and Three Forks Formations in North Dakota and Montana and the Eagle Ford Formation in Texas.

Figure 8: Well drilling into Marcellus Shale, from Pennsylvania Independent Oil &Gas Association; www.pioga.org.

POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH HYDRAULIC FRACTURING

WATER QUALITY

Fluids used in hydraulic fracturing are a mixture of water, proppant, and chemical additives. Additives typically include gels to carry the proppant into the fractures; surfactants to reduce friction and pipe corrosion; hydrochloric acid to help dissolve minerals and initiate cracks; and scale inhibitors and biocides to limit bacterial growth [16]. The exact mix of additives depends on the formation to be fractured. These chemical additives typically make up about 0.5% by volume of well fracturing fluids, but may be up to 2% [12, 16]. Some potential additives are harmful to human health, even at very low concentrations [17]. Unless diesel is used, the fracturing fluids are not regulated by the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). Underground disposal of oil and gas wastes, however, are regulated by SDWA [18].

Figure 9: Water cycle in hydraulic fracturing; from U.S. EPA's Study of the Potential Impacts of Hydraulic Fracturing on Drinking Water Resources, Progress Report, 2012.

Potential pathways for the fracturing fluids to contaminate water include surface spills prior to injection, fluid migration once injected, and surface spills of flowback and produced water (Fig. 9). Because the fluids are injected into the subsurface under high pressure, and because some of the fracturing fluids remain underground, there is concern that this mixture could move through the well bore or fractures created in the reservoir rock by hydraulic pressure and ultimately migrate up and enter shallow formations that are sources of fresh water (aquifers)[19]. In addition, there is concern that geologic faults, previously existing fractures, or poorly plugged, abandoned wells could provide conduits for these fluids to move into and contaminate aquifers [20].

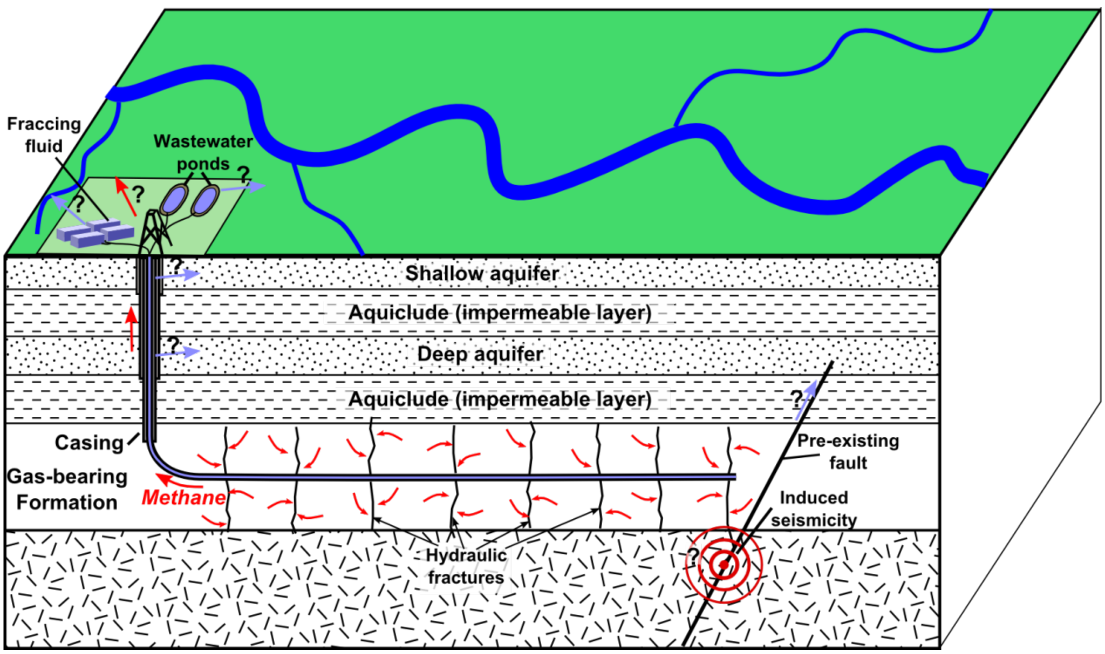

Figure 10: Diagram of possible fluid migration pathways and other environmental concerns with hydraulic fracturing. Source: Mike Norton, Wikimedia Commons.

The potential for contaminating groundwater due to hydraulic fracturing is an environmental risk being studied (Fig. 10) [19, 21, 22]. At present, there have been possibly two confirmed cases of groundwater contamination caused directly by the hydraulic fracturing process; in one location the fractured rock is within 420 feet of the aquifer [6, 14, 23]. One challenge is to distinguish natural contaminants that seep into groundwater unrelated to oil and gas development, from contamination due to aspects of drilling unrelated to hydraulic fracturing, and from contamination directly caused by hydraulic fracturing. There often are no water quality samples prior to hydraulic fracturing to provide a baseline comparison [6, 24, 25].

For example, methane has been detected in some water wells in areas with oil and gas development [26, 27]. Some researchers suggested hydraulic fracturing may be a mechanism to explain methane in water wells in northeastern Pennsylvania and upstate New York, although methane from leaking well casings was cited as a more likely possibility [22, 25]. Methane can naturally originate from gas-producing rock layers below and close to the aquifer and be unrelated to the deeper fractured zone [14, 24]. Analysis of the gas can be used to identify the origin of gas occurring in groundwater [24, 28].

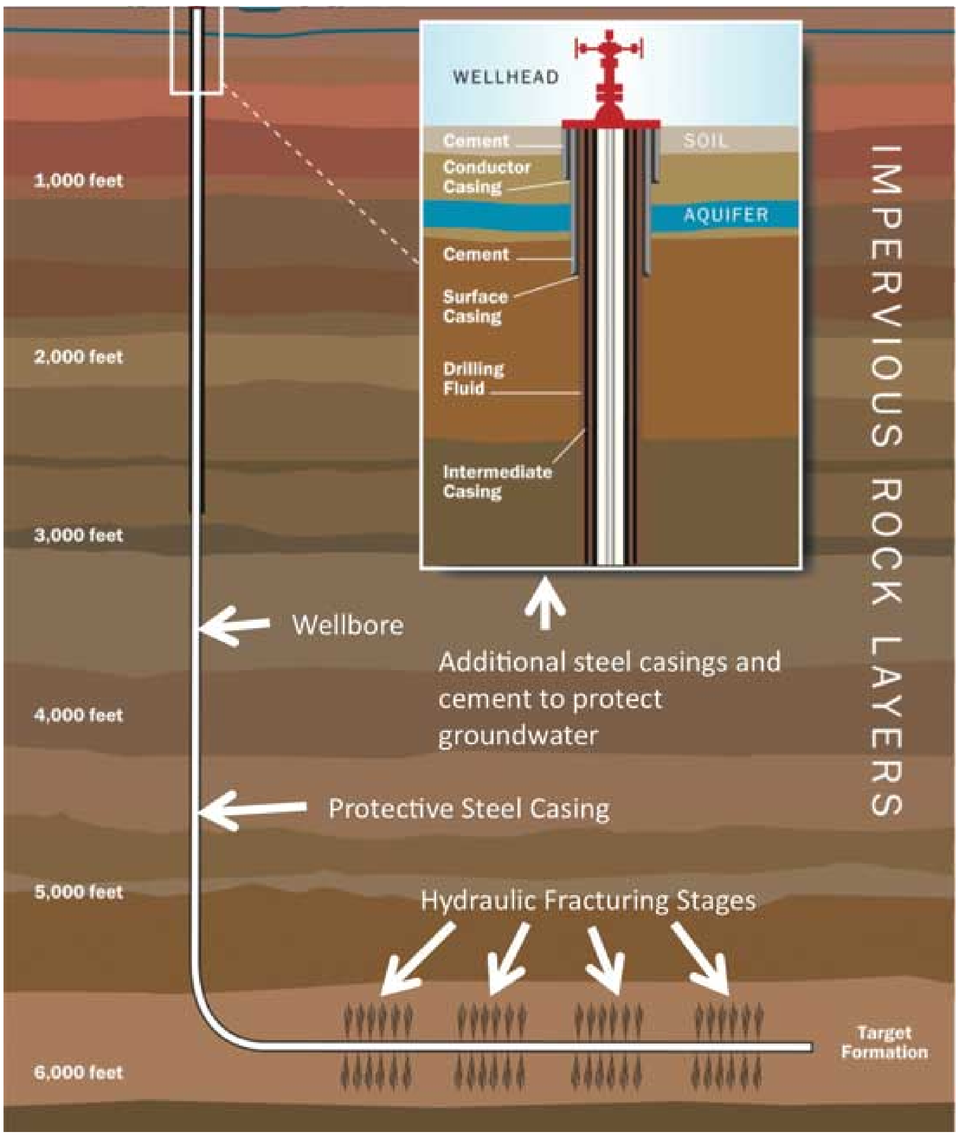

Figure 11: Horizontal Well Construction; from U.S. EPA Study Progress Report, December 2012, modified by Kansas Geological Survey [29].

There are confirmed sources of groundwater contamination, however, from improperly constructed oil and gas wells; this contamination is unrelated to the hydraulic fracturing process[20]. To protect groundwater, proper well design, construction, and monitoring are necessary. During well construction, multiple layers of telescoping pipe (or casing) are installed and cemented in place, with the intent to create impermeable barriers between the inside of the well and the surrounding rock [12]. It is also common practice to pressure-test the cement seal between the casing and rock or to otherwise examine the integrity of wells. Wells that extend through a rock formation that contains high-pressure gas require special care in stabilizing the well bore and stabilizing the cement, or their integrity can be damaged [6].

The physical separation between the relatively shallow freshwater aquifer and the usually much deeper oil- and gas-producing rock layer provides additional protection. Typically there are thousands of feet of mostly low to very low permeability rock layers between an aquifer and oil or gas reservoir rocks that prevent fracturing fluids and naturally migrated hydrocarbons from reaching the aquifer. In areas where there is concern about faults, fractures, or plugged wells, various geophysical methods can be used to locate and avoid faults. There is also renewed interest in the need to locate and plug abandoned or "orphaned" oil and gas wells and unused water wells as a further measure to protect near-surface aquifers. In some regions, identifying and properly plugging all the abandoned wells is a significant undertaking [30]. Proper storage and disposal of fracturing fluids and produced water is important to ensure that both surface water and groundwater are protected. Most fracturing fluids and produced water are re-injected into Class II wells [18] drilled specifically for deep disposal, treated in wastewater treatment facilities, or recycled [32]. Wastewater treatment facilities, designed primarily for municipal waste, can be overwhelmed with the volume and treatment of fracturing fluids and produced water; a number will not accept it [31]. Disposal wells inject waste water deep into formations that originally produced the oil and gas, or into different formations that generally contain highly saline and otherwise unusable water. Water is generally co-produced in equal or larger volumes than petroleum throughout the life of a well. Fluid handling and disposal are issues for all oil and gas activity, not only activity associated with hydraulic fracturing. Appropriate management practices and regulatory oversight are important to assure that accidental leaks and spills are minimized.

Figure 12: Groundwater Water Quality Sampling from a small diameter, temporary borehole. Kansas Department of Health and Environment, 2012.

Baseline water-quality testing, carried out prior to oil and gas drilling, helps to document the quality of local natural groundwater and may identify contamination, or lack thereof, before oil and gas activity occurs [34, 35]. Without such pre-drilling baseline testing, it is difficult to know if contamination existed before drilling, occurred naturally, or was the result of oil and gas activity. Many natural contaminants, including methane and elevated chlorides, occur naturally in shallow groundwater in oil- and gas-producing areas and are unrelated to drilling activities [27]. The quality of water in private wells is not regulated at the state or federal level, and many owners do not have their well water tested for contaminants. States handle contamination issues differently. For instance, Colorado requires baseline sampling of wells in oil- and gas-producing regions as part of its regulatory process [16, 34]. Pennsylvania places the presumptive burden of proof on oil and gas companies if groundwater contamination of drinking-water sources is found [16]. New York and West Virginia are considering adopting baseline testing rules. In most states, however, such baseline sampling is only voluntary.

Figure 13: Measuring groundwater depth before sampling, from a non-pumping well installed to monitor water quality conditions. Kansas Department of Health and Environment, 2012.

While there is little evidence of groundwater contamination due to hydraulic fracturing itself, there are still many questions about the risks to aquifers with the rapidly expanding industry developing tight oil and gas reserves using modern hydraulic fracturing techniques [6, 14, 19, 20, 21, 23]. There are few long term, peer-reviewed scientific studies. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Scientific Advisory Board study *Potential Impacts of Hydraulic Fracturing on Drinking Water Resources*, to be released in 2014, will be an important contribution. Local baseline testing of groundwater quality prior to hydraulic fracturing operations can provide valuable data for assessing the contamination risks.

Contamination risks to surface water are another environmental concern with the development of tight oil and gas reserves. The potential for contamination has led to increased regulations in some U.S. states. Potential pathways for contamination include surface spills, waste disposal, and land spreading of well cuttings. A study of the gas shale development in Pennsylvania documented increased chlorides downstream of the waste treatment plant and elevated total suspended solids downstream of shale gas wells [36]. The elevated suspended solids appear related to the land clearing for the well pad, roads, and related infrastructure.

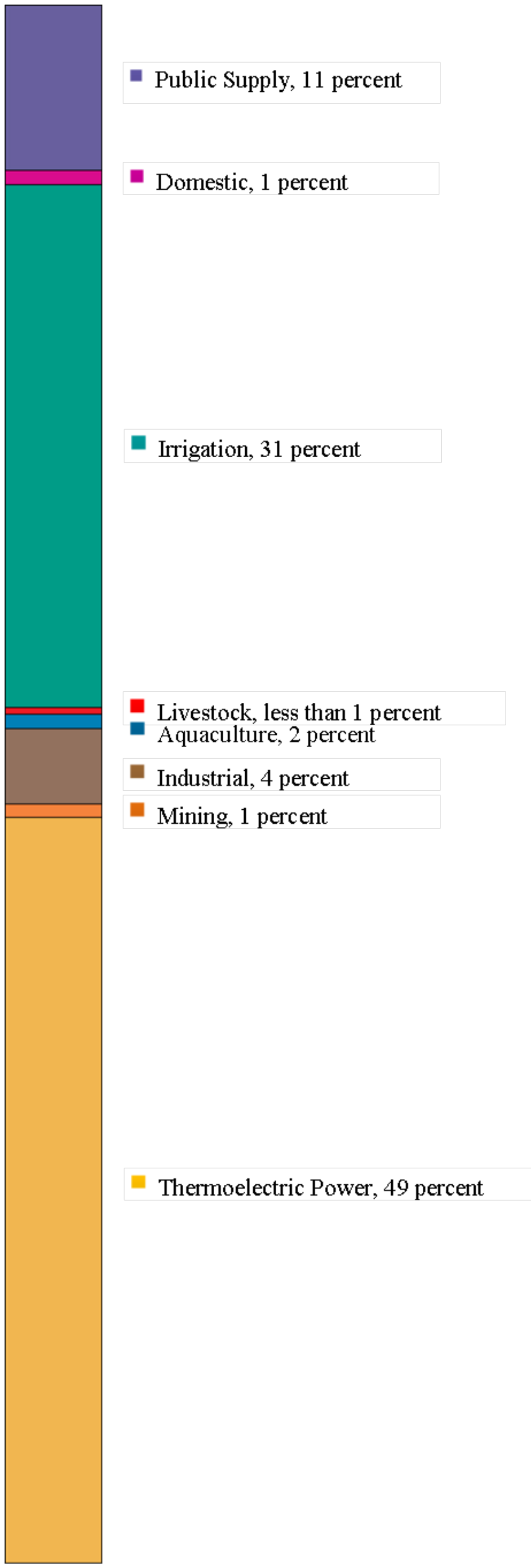

Figure 14: Water use by sector, 2005. Water for oil and gas development is in mining category. Note that thermoelectric power is mostly non-consumptive use of water. USGS Circular 1344, Report on 2010 water use data expected in 2014.

Water Use

Hydraulic fracturing, particularly when applied to horizontal wells, can use 13 million gallons or more water per well, though two to five million gallons is more typical [16, 40]. These are one-time uses per well. As a category, water used in oil and gas development is relatively small in comparison to other recurring uses (Fig. 14) [16, 29]. However, where drilling rates are high and particularly in water-short areas, water use for hydraulic fracturing can become significant. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is studying the potential competition of hydraulic fracturing with drinking water supplies, both current and future demands in two basins, one humid (Susquehanna River Basin, Pennsylvania) and one semi-arid (Upper Colorado River Basin, Colorado)[19]. Water needs thirty years out are based on drilling trends, natural gas production, and population growth.

Drilling companies are working on improved methods to recycle water used in hydraulic fracturing, or to use saline water that is unsuitable for drinking [32]. Many energy companies are treating and reusing produced and flowback water; the feasibility depends on the quantity, quality, and duration of water generated [37]. Some companies are trying nonflammable propane fracking fluid, which contains no water [44]. However, because of chemical mixing considerations and costs, fresh water continues to be the preferred and primary source of water for hydraulic fracturing in many areas.

POTENTIAL TRIGGERED OR INDUCED SEISMICITY

Injection of fluids deep into the earth can trigger a small or moderate earthquake. There are two types of fluid injections that may occur with oil and gas development: (1) injection of hydraulic fracturing fluids into the reservoir rock; and (2) disposal of waste fluids through deep well injection. Hydraulic fracturing imparts pressures of several thousand pounds per square inch on reservoir rocks. The fractures created in these rocks may extend several hundred feet away from the borehole (Fig. 15) but generally no more than that due to physical and technological limitations on the hydraulic fracturing process[38]. As small cracks are induced in rock formations, the hydraulic fracturing process creates very small seismic events or earthquakes. This microseismic activity is generally too small for humans to feel or to cause surface damage [14]. It can be detected by instruments at the surface that monitor the fracturing process and can precisely determine where the fractures have propagated. A number of studies, including one by the National Academy of Sciences, have determined that hydraulic fracturing does not create a high risk for creating seismicity strong enough to be destructive or for people to feel [33].

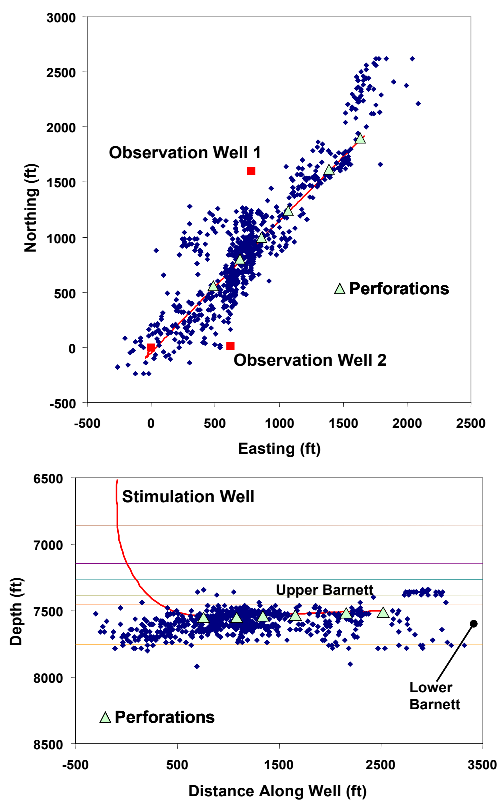

Figure 15: Seismic Expression from Hydraulic Fracturing; Warpinski et al, 2005. Reproduced with permission of SPE; further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Disposal of large volumes of waste fluids produced from hydraulically fractured rocks through deep-well injection has been documented to produce small earthquakes, generally less than magnitude 2.0 [33]. Wells that have been hydraulically fractured produce large volumes of waster fluids (produced and flowback water). Deep disposal of any fluids, whether or not they are associated with oil and gas production, can trigger earthquakes [33, 39]. Most, although not all, of these earthquakes have occurred in areas of long-term or continuous injection of wastewater into the subsurface. Fluids injected near a subsurface fault can reduce the frictional resistance that keeps faults from slipping. These small movements allow energy already stored in brittle rock formations to be released in earthquakes. In some situations, sites of slowly accumulating forces in the earth resulting from natural geologic processes are already susceptible to seismic events (which is why this is often referred to as “triggered seismicity”). Deep well injection of fluids has been suspected as the likely cause of seismicity in excess of magnitude 2.0 over the past several decades, including a magnitude 5.7 earthquake in 2011 in Oklahoma[40]. The potential for triggered seismicity with the increasing volume of wastewater disposal is unknown [33, 40, 45].

REGULATION ISSUES

Oil and gas exploration and production activity is regulated at the federal, state, and local level. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Scientific Advisory Board is studying issues related to hydraulic fracturing and has investigated complaints of possible groundwater contamination related to hydraulic fracturing. Most regulation continues to reside with state agencies, many of which have extensive experience in oil and gas regulation. The Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission (IOGCC), a multi-state commission ratified by Congress, helps states establish and coordinate regulation of the oil and gas industry. The Ground Water Protection Council (GWPC) and the State Review of Oil and Natural Gas Environmental Regulations (STRONGER) also assist in this effort. In addition, acquisition of water for hydraulic fracturing is subject to state regulation and state laws regarding water rights.

Disclosure of chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing is currently exempt from federal regulations associated with the Safe Drinking Water Act. In response to public requests for disclosure of the composition of fluids used in hydraulic fracturing, the IOGCC and the GWPC established a publicly accessible hydraulic-fracturing chemical registry website called FracFocus 2.0 (FracFocus.org) (Fig. 16). At least 18 states require companies to disclose the identity of chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing, although all of these states protect trade secrets from disclosure because this information is considered proprietary.

Figure 16. Frac Focus home website, FracFocus.org.

STAYING INFORMED

Hydraulic fracturing of shale and other tight rocks has become a growing component of oil and gas energy production in the U.S., particularly in terms of natural gas production from shale. While there are potential impacts from hydraulic fracturing, most concerns relate to long-established processes used in nearly all oil and gas drilling—such as well construction or fluid disposal—and are not unique to the process of hydraulic fracturing itself. There remains, however, a significant need for accurate information dissemination, improved dialogue between consumers and producers, and ongoing research on hydraulic fracturing and its potential environmental impact. Meanwhile, peer-reviewed professional publications remain the most reliable source of scientific and technical information about hydraulic fracturing. Geologists involved in aspects of the hydraulic fracturing technology, whether in exploration and development, regulation, natural resource management, or environmental protection, are encouraged to share their knowledge with the general public and policy makers.

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GLOSSARY

Aquifer: A body of permeable rock or sediment that is saturated with water and yields useful amounts of water.

Biocide: A chemical substance capable of destroying some life forms. In hydraulic fracturing, biocides are used to inhibit growth of bacteria and mold.

Carbonate rock: A rock composed primarily of carbonate minerals (minerals containing the CO_3 anionic structure, such as calcite). Common carbonate rocks are limestones and dolomites.

Casing: The hard metal or plastic pipe that lines the well, prevents a borehole from caving in, and provides a barrier to the outside rock and groundwater.

Chloride: A chemical compound with one or more chlorine atoms bonded within the molecule; a salt of hydrochloric acid. Table salt is sodium chloride (NaCl).

Fault: A fracture or fracture zone along which rock layers have moved.

Fine-grained: A geologic term to describe a rock texture, referring to its mineral or rock fragment components.

Formation: A basic unit of rock layers distinctive enough in appearance, composition, and age to be defined in geologic maps and classifications.

Flowback water: The fracturing fluid that returns to the surface through the wellbore during and after a hydraulic treatment.

Fracture: A crack or break in the rock.

Fracturing fluids: The water and chemical additives used to hydraulically fracture the reservoir rock, and proppant (typically sand or ceramic beads) pumped into the fractures to keep them from closing once the pumping pressure is released.

Frictional resistance: The force that inhibits the relative motion of two solid objects in contact. It is usually proportional to the force which presses the surfaces together.

Hydraulic fracturing: A process to propagate fissures in a subsurface rock layer with the injection of pressurized fluid through a wellbore, especially to extract oil or gas.

Hydrocarbon: An organic compound made of carbon and hydrogen, found in coal, crude oil, natural gas and plant life.

Kick-off point: The depth at which the vertical drill hole is deviated for directional drilling so the well bore can enter the target zone roughly horizontal.

Moment magnitude scale: Used by scientists to measure the size of earthquakes in terms of the energy released. The scale was developed in the 1970s to improve upon the Richter magnitude scale, particularly to describe large (M>7) earthquakes and those whose epicenter is over 370 miles away.

Microseismic: A faint earth tremor, typically less than Richter Magnitude zero, which was the detection limit in 1935.

Methane: A colorless, odorless and flammable gaseous hydrocarbon (CH_4).

Permeability: The capacity of a rock for transmitting a fluid. Permeability depends on the size and shape of pores in the rock, along with the size, shape, and extent of the connections between pore spaces.

Pore space: The spaces between grains in a rock that are unoccupied by solid material.

Produced water: The naturally occurring fluid in a formation that flows to the surface through the wellbore, throughout the entire lifespan of an oil or gas well. It typically has high levels of total dissolved solids with leached out minerals from the rock.

Proppant: Solid material used in hydraulic fracturing to hold open the cracks made in the reservoir rock after the high pressure of the fracturing fluids is reduced. Sand, ceramic beads, or miniature pellets "prop" open the cracks to allow for freer flow of oil or gas.

Reservoir rock: The oil or gas bearing rock, typically a fractured or porous and permeable rock formation.

Seismic event: An earth vibration, such as an earthquake or tremor.

Shale: A fine-grained sedimentary rock that formed from the compaction of finely layered silt and clay-sized minerals ("mud").

Shale gas: natural gas locked in tiny bubble-like pockets within shale or other layered, sedimentary rock.

Tight oil or gas reserves: Hydrocarbons dispersed in rocks of low permeability and porosity, which makes it more difficult to recover than conventional hydrocarbon deposits.

Well bore: A hole that is drilled to explore and recover natural resources, such as oil, gas, or water.