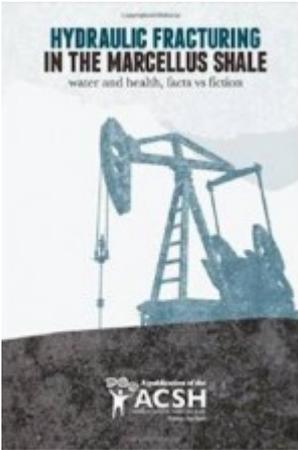


# Water pollution not from fracking, it seems neither are health effects

By ACSH Staff — September 16, 2014



This week's New York Times has a report from a group based at Ohio

State University which found that water contamination by methane and other hydrocarbons, even in areas where hydraulic fracturing of shale and horizontal drilling the technologies known as fracking is occurring is not the result of the process itself, but rather from well leaks.

Water contamination, especially the fear that aquifers might be polluted leading to vast water shortages, has been a main thrust of those groups that advocate against fracking activities which have been especially fervent in New York State's Southern tier. In fact, the anti-fracking campaigners have thus far convinced Gov. Andrew Cuomo to put a semi-permanent temporary moratorium on fracking in NYS, pending the outcomes of several never-ending studies by his Departments of Health and the Environment. This, despite the ongoing, productive fracking activities in adjoining regions of Pennsylvania, leading to benefits for both the local and national economies and energy supplies. (See ACSH's recent publications on [fracking here](#) <sup>[1]</sup> that conclude that fracking is both safe and of vital importance). It is well-known that a high percentage of well water contains methane and similar contaminants as a result of natural causes, having nothing to do with drilling activities.

On the other hand, a recent [survey of residents of Pennsylvania](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, living at various distances from natural-gas wells and drilling, found a higher risk of various self-reported health complaints among those living closer to such activities. These complaints included upper respiratory symptoms and skin rashes, by a two-fold higher factor among those living within a kilometer, as compared with those living more than 2 km away.

So what's wrong with this survey, asked ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross. A few things come to mind: self-reports, as opposed to medical diagnoses, are of course suspect especially on subjects as fraught as fracking and the possible litigation potential. The ostensible source of these health effects groundwater and air pollution have not been shown to actually occur. Further, factors such as

proximity to gas wells increase the likelihood of participating in such surveys. The study noted that people living further away from gas wells were less likely to respond to the survey. It seems quite likely that there is some contribution of a placebo effect.

Also, they conducted this study in southwestern PA where traditional oil and gas wells have been drilled for the last 100 years. These old wells have been associated with methane migration into groundwater through leaks and natural migration. Lastly, I d love to have seen responses from landowners who leased their drilling rights and compared them to those who had no relationship with the drilling companies. I bet that the leasers had a very low rate of health complaints.

"The final nail in this study's coffin is a double-whammy: it was published in that hotbed of green exaggeration, Environmental Health Perspectives, and it was funded by one of the "greenest" anti-fracking foundations, the Heinz group."

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**Links**

[1] <http://acsh.org/2014/06/fracking-health-facts-vs-fiction/>

[2] <http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2014/09/10/people-near-fracking-wells-health-symptoms/15337797/>