

Fracking: Information for Somerset Residents

In view of the motion passed by Mendip District Council on 30th September 2013, in which councillors unanimously resolved to formally register their concerns with the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) regarding unconventional gas exploration and extraction ('fracking') within the Mendip district and neighbouring areas, **Frack Free Somerset** has put together this information sheet to raise awareness of some of the potential issues for people living in Somerset.

We don't want to tell you what to think! Instead, we'd like to invite you to take the opportunity to find out why local people are gathering across our county to discuss this new technology, and to find out more about how it could affect you and your livelihood.

Property prices/land values

Evidence from the US and Australia suggests that unconventional gas or oil production on or near your property can have a profound effect on land and property values. US money advice site, MSN Money, reported in August 2013 that US mortgage lenders are becoming more cautious about approving loans for properties near fracking sites. For further information (f.f.i.), please visit: <http://money.msn.com/now/post--fracking-leaves-property-values-tapped-out>

In May 2012 Brian Smith of Daisytown, Pennsylvania was unable to refinance his home and was told by his lender, "While Quicken Loans makes every effort to help its clients reach their homeownership goals, like every lender, we are ultimately bound by very specific underwriting guidelines. In some cases conditions exist, such as gas wells and other structures in nearby lots that can significantly degrade a property's value. In these cases, we are unable to extend financing due to the unknown future marketability of the property."

Human health impacts & effects on pets, livestock and wildlife

The Pennsylvania Alliance for Clean Water and Air has compiled an ever-growing 'List of the Harmed', a litany of individuals and families seriously affected by fracking. F.f.i.: <http://pennsylvaniaallianceforcleanwaterandair.wordpress.com/the-list/>

There is mounting evidence that fracking activity, especially where it has involved accidents and spills, is killing pets, livestock and wildlife. A new report has found dozens of cases of illness, death and reproductive issues in cows, horses, goats, llamas, chickens, dogs, cats, fish and other wildlife, and in humans. It indicates that these conditions are likely to be the result of exposure to gas drilling operations.

F.f.i.: <http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/2012/03/reproductive-problems-death-animals-exposed-fracking>

For an extensive list of links to evidence, see: <http://frack-off.org.uk/mounting-evidence-the-harm-caused-by-fracking/>

Water shortages

In 2013 some towns in the US completely ran out of water, including Barnhart in Texas, where the well serving the town ran dry. Drought and increasing demand were cited as causes, but many locals also pointed to the vast amounts of water extracted by the local

fracking industry. Additionally, people relying on boreholes for their drinking water are very likely to be impacted by fracking close to their home or on their land. Many rural residents in the US are now having their drinking water trucked in by fracking companies (with the proviso that they sign 'non-disclosure agreements'.)

Water Contamination

In the US fracking has also been linked to water contamination and dangerous levels of radioactivity at waste sites. Heavy rain and floods can also compromise the holding lagoons present at every fracking pad for storing toxic fracking wastes, with overflow poisoning nearby streams and rivers. In Colorado, floodwaters recently inundated one of the most densely drilled regions in America; it is however still too early to assess the full extent of the contamination.

Scientific studies show that global warming is leading to increased rainfall, and Somerset was recently affected by extensive floodwaters, with the Environment Agency (EA) evidently stretched in its ability to respond. This puts into question the government's assurances that fracking will be carefully regulated, especially at a time when the EA is experiencing budget and staff cuts.

The current government has also overruled a proposal that fracking companies should be made to take out insurance bonds to cover the clean up of any pollution they cause. This gives energy companies licence to subcontract the drilling to a string of asset-free limited liability companies, which require no insurance. In the event of a major accident, they can then declare bankruptcy and walk away, leaving the pollution to be cleaned up at public expense.

Industrialisation of the landscape

Fracking takes up a lot of space – and well pads (which can be anything from 1-3 hectares in area) are usually located at 1-1.5km intervals. Unconventional gas and oil production also employs compressor stations, condensate tanks, and noisy flares and vents for waste products – all of which would change the character and beauty of our landscape.

Frack Off, the UK's Extreme Energy Action Network, has estimated that in Somerset 2,100 wells would be required to achieve the industry's stated production values. As well as profoundly industrialising our countryside, it would also affect farmland, food production and wildlife, with an additional impact on roads as heavier and a greatly increased volume of traffic is required to service fracking sites. Long after the drilling rigs are gone a legacy of fracking is thousands of miles of pipelines, carving up the countryside, while the inevitable leaks and explosions provide a constant threat to the areas concerned.

Burning fossil fuels and other nations that have banned fracking

At Frack Free Somerset, we're also concerned that unconventional gas and oil production in the UK is jeopardizing the development of a low carbon energy policy and our chances of meeting our 2020 carbon emissions targets. Germany and France amongst other countries around the world have already passed moratoria on fracking, and we urge the UK government to do the same.

Will you join us in informing yourself and others about fracking and how it could affect us all? Thank you for reading this – we look forward to meeting you soon!
Information sheet produced by Frack Free Somerset – www.frackfreesomerset.org/