

PRESS STATEMENT

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Shocking Discovery: PFAS Forever Chemicals in Fracking Fluids Leading scientists, community members, and environmental organizations outraged that health harms of fracking are brutally compounded

New York, New York, July 12, 2021 - Overwhelming evidence demonstrates that toxic PFAS chemicals—per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances—are potentially injected into the ground, through drinking water supplies, to frack wells for natural gas. PFAS are known as “forever chemicals” because they never break down in the environment. Even tiny doses of these forever chemicals build up in the human body, threatening chronic and toxic effects, including cancer, especially in small children. Even relatively small PFAS releases in communities nation-wide have forced governments to search for alternative drinking water sources and undertake extensive drinking water treatment and expensive cleanup operations.

The chemicals used in fracking are even worse than thought. The Physicians for Social Responsibility’s “Fracking with Forever Chemicals” report demonstrates that even using the scant information that the Environmental Protection Agency requires, it can be concluded that the drilling and fracking industry is injecting dangerous poisons through ground and drinking water and that PFAS can make its way into wastewater produced by fracking.

The possible use of PFAS to frack wells in the Marcellus shale of Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Ohio amplifies alarm bells already ringing about the health hazards of drilling and fracking.

In the Delaware River Watershed, the new information underscores the need to ban frack wastewater treatment, transport, and disposal in this watershed, which provides the sole drinking water source for up to 17 million people.

The companies that have used PFAS or substances that break down into PFAS have been big gas shale developers in Pennsylvania. XTO Energy, Inc., EOG Resources, Chevron, and Anadarko all developed and operated wells in the state and may have employed forever chemicals in fracking. Since the wastewater produced by fracking (“produced water”) contains the chemicals used in drilling and fracking fluids,

PFAS substances may be in the wastewater produced by the gas wells these companies produced.

The Delaware River Frack Ban Coalition organizing committee, along with tens of thousands of members of the public, calls on the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) to ban fracking wastewater storage, processing, discharge and/or disposal within the watershed. The Coalition is hosting a webinar with Dusty Horwitt, the author of the report “Fracking with Forever Chemicals” on Wednesday, July 21, at 7pm. Register here: <https://bit.ly/FrackBan721>.

Shale gas wells that are developed in Pennsylvania could be using PFAS or substances that break down into PFAS but it is difficult, if not impossible, to know this for certain. As explained in the report, FracFocus, the report’s primary source, allows chemical identities to be withheld as confidential. As stated in the report, “But confidentiality claims and other hurdles make it extremely difficult for the public to know for certain where this particular chemical or other oil and gas chemicals associated with PFAS have or are being used.”

This is true for Pennsylvania under PADEP regulations. Gas well developers in Pennsylvania keep chemicals they use in fracking secret and did so in 55% of the wells drilled in Pennsylvania between 2013 and 2017.

The only way to know if PFAS is or was in fracking fluids for certain is by testing wastewater, soils, and sediments at locations where gas companies have fracked or are fracking, and through analysis of fracking fluids for the chemicals, assuming the chemical properties are known and can be analyzed.

This may sound like a daunting task; but just as in the hunt for PFAS in communities across the nation impacted by PFAS pollution, these investigations are essential to protect human health and the environment and must be paid for by those who released the poisons. This is an emergency need that requires immediate action by government.

Organizations in the Delaware River Frack Ban Coalition Organizing Committee:

Berks Gas Truth
Catskill Mountainkeeper
Clean Water Action
Damascus Citizens for Sustainability
Delaware Riverkeeper Network
Environment New Jersey
Food & Water Watch
New Jersey Sierra Club