



Position Statement

“Fracking” - Hydraulic Fracturing for Natural Gas

Sierra Club urges lawmakers to pass legislation that will delay the controversial natural gas ‘fracking’ process until strong safety regulations are in place to protect human health and the state’s water resources.

Issue Background

Horizontal hydraulic fracturing is a controversial process for extracting natural gas that puts Michigan’s fresh water at risk. “Fracking,” as it is most commonly known, is quickly becoming the prevalent method for extracting natural gas. In this process, millions of gallons of water, laced with thousands of gallons of chemicals, are forcibly pumped down a well to blast open tight rock fissures to access gas deposits as deep as 10,000 feet.

The polluted water that flows out of the well carries toxic and radioactive substances mobilized from the rock by the fracking chemicals. In addition, each fracking operation consumes millions of gallons of water from local watersheds and the Great Lakes basin. Also, a Congressional report on fracking listed 750 chemicals used in the fracking process, of which at least 29 of the chemicals are carcinogens or pose a risk to human health.

Current DEQ regulations are inadequate and must be updated to protect our health, water, air, and the Great Lakes from the dangers of fracking. There must be a delay in issuing new permits for natural gas extraction using fracking until a number of critical safeguards are in place.

Proposed Safeguards:

- Gas companies must be required to follow all state laws regarding water withdrawals – something they are currently exempt from.
- Gas companies must disclose all chemicals to be used in the drilling process during the permit application process.
- Strong and enforceable water quality management practices must be in place.
- The permitting process must include a full public participation process, which currently does not exist. This includes a comment period for permits, the right to request a public hearing, and the right to contest permit decisions.
- All wells, pipelines, equipment and infrastructure must be regularly inspected.
- Radioactive traces in water and other water quality parameters must be regularly monitored.
- Air pollution controls must be implemented, including requiring use of truck idling limits, clean diesels, electric and alternative fueled vehicles, and controls on flares and the venting of methane.
- Michigan agency scientists should undertake a study of total cumulative impacts of natural gas operations in the state, including on water withdrawals, spills, contamination, air impacts from methane, hydrogen sulfide, other gaseous emissions, and other impacts.

Please contact the Sierra Club Michigan Chapter office at (517) 484-2372 for more information.