



Policy Position: Hydraulic Fracturing

February 2012

There is currently significant commercial interest in hydraulic fracturing operations (commonly known as 'fracking') in a number of locations in the United Kingdom.

The process involves using deep drilling techniques coupled with the use of hydraulic pressure (through significant quantities of water and chemicals) to potentially release shale gas within the sub strata that could subsequently be used to provide energy.

Operations expected to start in the UK in January 2012 are still suspended following two small-scale earthquakes in Lancashire that have been attributed to fracking.

In a global context major fracking operations are currently limited to North America.

The USA's Environmental Protection Agency's research programme is trying to uncover the full environmental and health-related implications of fracking. This research will underpin a report by the organisation that is expected towards the end of 2012.

The US states of New York and New Jersey currently have moratoriums on fracking until EPA's findings are disclosed later this year.

France, Bulgaria and South Africa have suspended the search for shale gas until research uncovers the potential long-term impacts upon human health and the environment.

There are a number of potential impacts that fracking could have upon both human health and the environment. These include:

- Impacts on drinking water supplies
- Impacts on air quality and consequent associated respiratory disorders
- Geological impacts (seismic activity)
- Noise impacts
- Release of naturally occurring radioactive materials (NORMS)

CIEH, whilst recognising the economic and energy benefits potentially associated with the technology, nonetheless believes that there is insufficient current evidence to confirm that all these potential risks can be suitably reduced and/or managed within acceptable levels.

We therefore advocate that:

- 1: The precautionary principle must remain the overriding principal for the UK at present.
- 2: The evidence base as it relates to potential and actual environmental and human health impacts should be kept under regular review and must inform policy and decision making.
- 3: That a full, independent environmental impact assessment must be carried out prior to any initial exploratory operations commencing.
- 4: That full land remediation must be a non negotiable condition of any such approvals.

This policy position should be read in conjunction with our policy briefing note:
Hydraulic Fracturing: Impacts on the Environment and Human Health; February 2012