



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry

A voice for justice, equality and compassion in New Jersey

Speaking out for Environmental Protection

Policy Brief: Fracking Waste

Position: As Unitarian Universalists, four of our core principles are:

- *Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part;*
- *The inherent worth and dignity of every person;*
- *Justice, equality and compassion in human relations;*
- *The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.*

The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry calls on the State Legislature to override Governor Christie's veto of A575/S253 that bans the transportation in New Jersey of waste material from fracking processes. Our existence, and that of all living things on earth, depends upon water. As humans, we seek justice and equity in society through the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process. Thus, we are called to take action and stop the contamination of our water that occurs whenever fracking is used.

Background

To extract natural gas from geological formations such as Marcellus Shale, wells about a mile deep are drilled and then a slurry of various chemicals and water are forced underground in a process known as hydrological fracturing, or fracking. To drill and frack just one well often consumes millions of gallons of fresh water, which are turned into toxic and potentially radioactive wastewater. The process also produces hundreds of tons of solid waste. Disposal of these wastes poses serious environmental and public health risks, since they contain not only the chemicals used in the fracking fluid, but also harmful contaminants from deep underground that are carried back to the surface after fracking.

Basis of Our Position

- Known and suspected carcinogens that have been present in fracking fluids include naphthalene, benzene, and acrylamide. Other environmental toxins present in some fracking fluids, such as toluene, ethylbenzene, and xylenes, can result in nervous system, kidney, and/or liver problems. Some fracking fluid recipes are proprietary; and, because there is no federal requirement for disclosure, fracking fluid can contain other, unknown chemical additives. This means the full threat of fracking fluid is unknown.
- Harmful contaminants that are brought to the surface can include arsenic, lead, hexavalent chromium, barium, strontium, benzene, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, toluene, salts, and such naturally occurring radioactive material as Radium-226, and its breakdown component, Radon. Conventional wastewater treatment facilities are not equipped to treat radioactive material and other contaminants in fracking wastewater. Therefore, many of these materials simply flow through such treatment facilities and get discharged into public rivers and streams, where they can contaminate drinking water for downstream communities and harm aquatic life essential for sustaining recreational and commercial fisheries.
- In 2011, 1.4 billion gallons of fracking waste was produced from Pennsylvania Marcellus Shale drilling sites. Much of it was sent to Ohio for disposal; some of it came to New Jersey. The lack of treatment facilities capable of processing this waste in both Pennsylvania and Ohio makes New Jersey an increasingly likely target. However, at this time, there are no New Jersey treatment plants that are designed to safely treat the levels of radioactivity found in fracking wastes from Marcellus Shale.

Policy Brief: Banning Fracking for Natural Gas in NJ

Position: The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry calls on the State Legislature to pass bills A567 and S246 to ban fracking for natural gas in New Jersey.

Background

In 2011, the New Jersey Senate was the first statewide legislative body to pass such a ban, thus making a pro-environment statement that Unitarian Universalists, with our stated concern for the interdependent web of life, find a natural fit with our principles. The measure passed with a strong bipartisan majority in both chambers of New Jersey's legislature. However, Governor Christie vetoed the bill and the legislature never overrode that action. The governor's veto of this bill does not seem to align with popular sentiment. This is made clearer by considering the volume of public comments on fracking in New Jersey. In November 2011, more than 70,000 comments opposing fracking were delivered to members of the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC). Unitarian Universalists strongly believe that these environmentally sound views should determine the New Jersey policy on fracking.

While we have been concerned about the dangers to our water supplies due to fracking for natural gas in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, the US Environmental Protection Agency has been studying the same issues that have arisen near Pavillion, Wyoming. On Dec. 8, 2011 they issued, for public comment, a draft of their findings, entitled *Investigation of Ground Water Contamination near Pavillion, Wyoming* which documents the results of that study. Since the public comment period on this draft has been extended twice, it has obviously generated some controversy about the risks to the water supplies that people rely upon. Nevertheless, due to similarities between the situation they studied and the situation here, a quotation from the abstract of that report explains why fracking must be banned, for the short term at the very least:

“Although some natural migration of gas would be expected above a gas field such as Pavillion, data suggest that enhanced migration of gas has occurred within ground water at depths used for domestic water supply and to domestic wells. Further investigation would be needed to determine the extent of gas migration and the fate and transport processes influencing migration to domestic wells.” (1)

How can we act as responsible stewards of our environment, being sure that we are using resources sustainably and without dangerous or destructive exploitation, when there remains a need for investigation into such questions in an area where hydrologic fracturing has already taken place? The researchers for the Federal government recommended that there is a need for collection of baseline data, greater transparency on chemical composition of hydraulic fracturing fluids, and greater emphasis on well construction and integrity requirements and testing. We agree that implementation of those recommendations would decrease the likelihood of impact to ground water and increase public confidence in the technology. As long as these questions remain open, we believe that it is irresponsible to allow fracking in New Jersey.

(1) http://www.epa.gov/region8/superfund/wy/pavillion/EPA_ReportOnPavillion_Dec-8-2011.pdf
(pg. xiii) downloaded April 12, 2013

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