

A Chorus of Criticism

Today fracking takes place across the U.S., and energy companies hope to greatly expand the practice. But their plans have run into a growing chorus of criticism. Environmentalists say fracking should be banned because it can contaminate groundwater with chemicals. Groundwater provides drinking water for millions of Americans. According to Pro-Publica, an investigative-journalism service, more than 1,000 cases of water contamination linked to fracking were documented by U.S. courts and state and local governments in 2008 alone.

"Fracking threatens the air we breathe, the water we drink, the communities we love, and the climate on which we all depend," Wenonah Hauter, president of Food and Water Watch, tells JS. "We can't expect future generations to clean up our messes, which is why we need to ban fracking now." Hauter thinks that the U.S. should focus more on developing renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power instead of fracking to obtain fossil fuels.

In Defense of Fracking

Fracking also has strong defenders. "What do we stand to [lose] if fracking is outlawed?" asks Gerry Calhoun a geologist in *The Tennessean*. "About 29 percent of our electricity comes from natural gas supplies. If we cut off those resources, we will have to import increasing amounts of gas and oil at much higher prices."

Steve Herz, of New York's Joint Landowners Coalition, maintains that fracking is safe. "Having visited hundreds of well sites . . . and interviewed officials in all 28 states

developing natural gas, . . . we believe fracking can be done safely and responsibly," he tells JS.

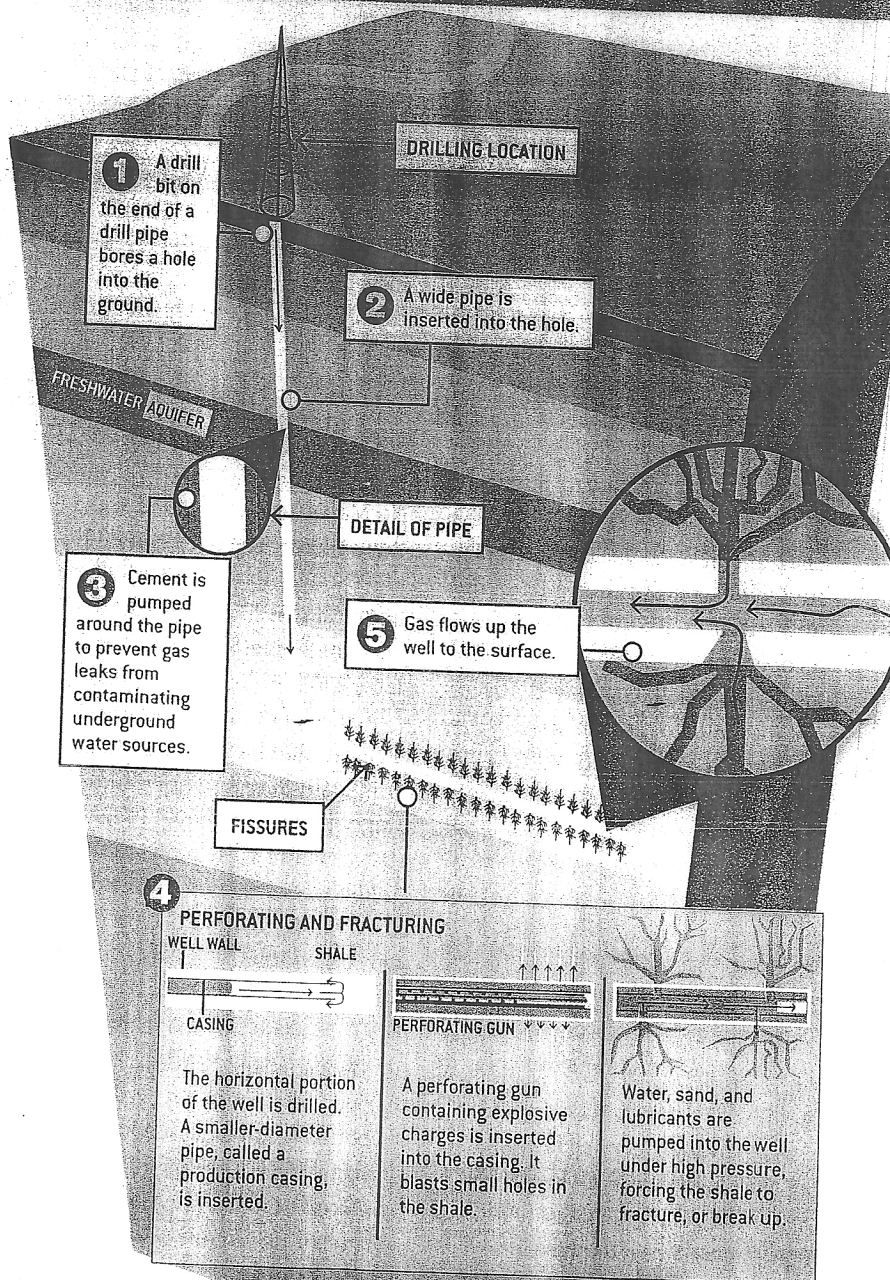
President Barack Obama expressed his support of fracking in a speech in Las Vegas. "We have a supply of natural gas that can last America nearly a hundred years," he said. "It could power our cars, our homes and our factories. . . .

Experts believe it could support more than 600,000 jobs."

However, it is up to state officials to approve the use of fracking, not the president. Lobbyists for both sides are busy trying to influence officials to pass laws for or against fracking. Which side prevails could shape America's energy future.

—Charles Piddock

HOW HYDRAULIC FRACTURING WORKS



*DIAGRAM IS SCHEMATIC, NOT TO SCALE.