

It's as if the pump was primed by the oil & gas industry in collusion with the EPA to literally flood the Internet with stories like the one you posted about Franklin Forks, Hank. As I see it, there has been an unhealthy link between the PA DEP and the industry it is supposed to regulate for a long time now. The big question is has that kind of back scratching crept into the EPA?

So I think there's more to the story than what you posted.

I found this on <http://www.frackcheckwv.net/> and I suspect you will see more, in depth reporting like this in the days to come.

- - Jay

## **The Shale Gas Review: Frack Chemicals and Water Contamination**

by S. Tom Bond on May 14, 2013



Tom Wilber

**Commentary from Tom Wilber, The Shale Gas Review, May 10, 2013**

*The migration of fracking chemicals in the soil, in the earth's strata and in groundwater are problems that are not fully understood. Plus, the chemicals resulting from drilling and fracking contain some toxic materials that have been leached from the earth or exposed by the drilling and frack operations. Tom Wilber in his blog entitled "[Shale Gas Review](#)" takes up these topics.*

The gas industry claims that drilling is not a public health threat, and that fracking fluid is harmless. In support of these claims it cites lack of evidence tying operations to pollution and illness. What's missing is full disclosure. The industry operates on private property without the level of regulatory oversight that other industries face. (It is exempt from both federal Safe Drinking Water Act and hazardous waste laws that require disclosure of what goes into and what comes out of the ground.)

When something goes wrong, it is often a matter between the company and the homeowner to resolve. When legal pressure necessitates, the industry can make the problem go away with settlements that contain non-disclosure clauses.

A recent example came to light with a personal injury claim against Range Resources and other operators by a family in Mt. Pleasant Township, Pa. Range Resources agreed to pay the Hallowich family \$750,000 to settle a lawsuit for personal injury damages related to operations near their home. The case was settled by the parties in 2011, no official complaint was filed, and the records were sealed.

We only know this because the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and the Washington Observer-Reporter filed and won a suit to get the records unsealed. The unsealed documents also revealed that the PA Department of Environmental Protection did not maintain records of an investigation into a complaint about water contamination at a neighboring property, and that the investigator, Mark Kiel, soon left the agency to work for the gas drilling company he had been investigating. For every case that gets unsealed, there are hundreds, if not thousands of cases sealed in documents that are never opened because their public relevance goes unchallenged.

Meanwhile, both the DEP and gas companies are able to keep matters of public interest unfolding in Susquehanna County from full public view. Last week, the DEP issued a brief statement that exonerated gas company WPX of causing methane pollution in three wells in the Township of Franklin Forks. Yet the agency is not releasing any results related to the investigation or to its conclusions. It is known that the Franklin Forks area and the nearby Salt Springs State Park contain rich methane reservoirs in both deep and shallow formations (hence the attractiveness of the area to petroleum operators). Although the DEP released its conclusions that the gas affecting the water wells was not from nearby gas wells or production zones being tapped by WPX, it did not explain the source or course of pollution at concentrations five times greater than the threshold for explosion risks.

Franklin Forks may have been less of a story if not for events that have unfolded in Dimock Township, about a dozen miles to the south. More than four years after the explosion of a residential water well called attention to the problem, the DEP is still investigating recurring water pollution problems in the middle of a gas field being developed by Cabot Oil & Gas. Wells providing water to several dozen homes have been taken off line or fitted with filtration equipment to remove gas and other pollution since the water well of Norma Fiorentino exploded on New Year's Day, 2009. Under the Rendell administration, the DEP cited Cabot for various violations related to the problems.

Now Governor Tom Corbett's DEP is investigating cases involving two homes in an area where the agency has banned drilling of new wells in the wake of chronic water problems. Recent tests showed dangerous levels of methane flowing into residential water wells near the junction of Carter Road and State Route 3023. Yet the problem, in the eyes of the DEP, remains elusive. "We are slowly getting some test results back," DEP spokeswoman Colleen Connolly said. "However – as per our attorney, DEP does not share test results from private water wells with anyone but the private well owner."

To be clear, the agency has a policy of releasing incomplete data to homeowners, a policy that has produced much criticism but little action. Officials justify the long-standing practice of excluding some fields as a sound method to filter noise from relevant data. Critics argue that the agency cherry picks the data, and the unreleased fields might be useful indicators of drilling contamination and other problems. Moreover, homeowners have a right to all results of water quality tests that can flag health risks.

The fight over the cause and consequences of methane seeping into private water wells in Susquehanna County is one example of an issue that could stand a little more legal leverage from professional news outlets. While some outlets, including the Scranton Times-Tribune, do what they can with declining resources to report the story, readers would be well served by a legal challenge to the DEP's refusal to release ground water analysis paid for by tax-payer money concerning matters of overwhelming public interest.

See also: [EcoWatch](#), [WVSORO](#), and [FrackCheckWV](#)