

Fracking and the Contamination of Groundwater

EPA Censored Key Pennsylvania Fracking Water Contamination Study

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A must-read Los Angeles Times story by Neela Banerjee demonstrates that – once again – the Obama administration [put the kibosh on a key Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\) study on hydraulic fracturing \(“fracking”\) groundwater contamination, this time in Dimock, Pennsylvania.](#)

Though EPA said Dimock’s water wasn’t contaminated by fracking in a [2012 election year desk statement](#), internal documents obtained by LA Times reporter Neela Banerjee show regional EPA staff members saying the exact opposite among friends.

“In an internal EPA PowerPoint presentation...staff members warned their superiors that several wells had been contaminated with methane and substances such as manganese and arsenic, most likely because of local natural gas production,” writes Banerjee.

“The presentation, based on data collected over 4 1/2 years at 11 wells around Dimock, concluded that ‘methane and other gases released during drilling (including air from the drilling) apparently cause significant damage to the water quality.’ The presentation also concluded that ‘methane is at significantly higher concentrations in the aquifers after gas drilling and perhaps as a result of fracking [hydraulic fracturing] and other gas well work,’” Banerjee further explained.

It’s essentially a repeat of Steve Lipsky’s [water contamination by Range Resources in late-2010 in Weatherford, Texas](#). In that case, EPA conducted a taxpayer funded study, determined Range had contaminated his water, sued Range – and then proceeded to [drop the suit and censor the study in March 2012](#).

EPA also recently kicked the can down the road on a high-profile [fracking groundwater contamination study in Pavillion, Wyoming](#), originally set to come out in 2014. That release is now expected in 2016, another election year. Just days after EPA’s decision, a [Duke University study again linked fracking to groundwater contamination](#) in the [Marcellus Shale](#).

“We don’t know what’s going on, but certainly the fact that there’s been such a distinct withdrawal from three high-profile cases raises questions about whether the EPA is caving to pressure from industry or antagonistic members of Congress,” Kate Sinding of the *Natural Resources Defense Council* (NRDC) told the LA Times.

Ed Rendell and Friends At Work Again?

Located in the heart of the Marcellus Shale basin, Dimock was featured prominently in both “Gasland” documentaries, as well as in “[FrackNation](#),” the [industry-funded film](#) created to counter

Josh Fox's films, produced and directed by climate change deniers [Phelim McAleer](#) and Ann McElhinney.

In the case of "FrackNation," McAleer used EPA's desk statement for propaganda purposes. He portrayed Craig and Julie Sautner – whose water was contaminated by Cabot Oil and Gas – as "crying wolf" for expressing anger that EPA privately told them their water was contaminated, then publicly stated that it wasn't.

The Sautners aren't alone in their frustration, however, and they're in good company.

"What's surprising is to see this data set and then to see EPA walk away from Dimock," Robert Jackson, co-author of the June 2013 Duke study that included Dimock water samples, told the *LA Times*. "The issue here is, why wasn't EPA interested in following up on this to understand it better?"

Jackson raises the million dollar question: Who from the industry pressured USEPA to censor the actual results of the Dimock study? In Steve Lipsky's case it was former head of the Democratic National Committee and Democratic Governor of Pennsylvania, [Ed Rendell](#).

Rendell – tied to the shale gas industry via Ballard Spahr LLP law firm and venture capital firms Element Partners and Greenhill & Co. – privately lobbied EPA to shut down its study and lawsuit centered on Lipsky's groundwater contaminated by the Pennsylvania-headquartered Range Resources. His lobbying proved successful, likely in part due to three of his former aides now working as industry lobbyists.

One of those lobbyists is K. Scott Roy, Rendell's former "top advisor." Roy not only lobbies for Range Resources, but also sits on the Executive Board of the Marcellus Shale Coalition. Prior to serving in the Rendell administration and becoming a fracking lobbyist, Roy worked in the office of former PA Republican Governor Tom Ridge, who went on to serve as "strategic advisor" to the Marcellus Shale Coalition in 2012.

Did Roy contact his old boss Ed Rendell and request the Obama Administration step away from the Dimock study? That's a question for a follow-up investigation.

Dereliction of Duty, or Par For The Course?

By law, the EPA is tasked to investigate groundwater contamination cases and punish violators of the law with criminal sentences. Instead, the industry has run roughshod over communities nationwide, letting polluters go free with no EPA accountability.

"Our federal government has a responsibility to protect the citizens in communities that are suffering consequences from fracking and to give them the full facts," [wrote the NRDC's Kate Sinding in a blog post](#).

"It owes it to the American people to fully and fairly investigate every case that can help to answer some of the vexing scientific questions as to whether, and if so how, fracking and related activities contaminate drinking water. Sadly, EPA's recent pattern of activity suggests neither has been happening."

In the military, [dereliction of duty is a serious crime](#), but for upper-level EPA staffers, it seems to just be business as usual.

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