

Momentum Building for Fracking Bans



by **Emma Lui**

Above: Council of Canadians staff members Philippe Charbonneau, Matthew Ramsden and Emma Lui don hazmat suits, masks and safety goggles as they carry buckets of mock toxic fracking fluid to Parliament Hill. The buckets, in fact, held close to 10,000 petitions from Council of Canadians members calling on the federal government to ban fracking.



All across Canada communities are fighting controversial fracking projects that have the potential to contaminate and deplete local water sources, exacerbate climate change and harm public health.

Hydraulic fracturing, more commonly known as “fracking,” is a technique to extract natural gas from harder-to-access unconventional sources trapped in rock formations such as shale gas, coal bed methane and tight gas. Millions of litres of water and thousands of litres of chemicals are injected underground at very high pressure in order to create fractures in the rock, allowing gas to flow up the well.

There are many risks associated with fracking, including groundwater contamination from the toxic chemicals that are injected into the ground, and leaks of contaminated wastewater. The fluid waste from fracking contains toxic and radioactive substances. Fracking projects can also lower

groundwater levels and lead to the buildup of methane gas, a highly flammable substance that has been known to accumulate in shallow waters and household pipes near fracking sites.

Despite the risks associated with fracking, some provincial governments have issued permits for gas companies to start fracking projects, or to transport shale gas using the Pacific Trails Pipeline. With governments failing to protect water sources, the environment and public health, communities are taking matters into their own hands.

Blood Reserve, Alberta

Last fall a group of Indigenous women from the Kainai Nation (also known as the Blood Tribe) set up a blockade to stop Murphy Oil from

fracking on their traditional territory. In 2010, Kainaiwa Resources – a company solely owned by the Kainai Nation – quietly signed a deal with Canadian Bowood Energy and U.S. Murphy Oil that gave the two companies a five-year lease on half of the reserves' land in exchange for \$50 million. According to some members of the community, the Kainai Chief and Council failed to consult with the people about the land lease.

The women, who are a part of the Kainai Earth Watch, partnered with local groups, including the Lethbridge Chapter of the Council of Canadians, to block the companies' trucks, preventing them from entering the site in order to protect the community's health, wildlife, livestock, land and water from the harmful impacts of fracking operations. A little more than 24 hours after the blockade was set up, Lois Frank, Elle-Maija Apiniskim Tailfeathers and Jill Crop Eared Wolf were arrested. While the charges were dropped for two of the women in exchange for community service, Frank asserted that she had done nothing wrong and refused to accept a plea deal. The court stayed charges against Frank earlier this year.

Inverness County, Nova Scotia

The Nova Scotia government recently granted a one-year extension on Petroworth's permit allowing the company to drill an exploration oil well near Lake Ainslie. Community members are concerned that drilling so close to the lake will cause environmental damage and may eventually lead to fracking in the area, further threatening one of the largest natural freshwater lakes in Nova Scotia. The Council of Canadians' Inverness County Chapter is actively opposing fracking in the county. Following a request by the chapter, the Inverness County Council passed a resolution in support of a province-wide ban on fracking in February 2012. Council has yet to decide on a municipal bylaw that would ban fracking within the county. If passed, it would be the first bylaw of its kind in Canada.

Horn River Formation, British Columbia

The fracking project in the Horn River Formation in north-eastern British Columbia and the North West Territories has been called the "centre of fracking" and "the world's biggest frack." The proposed Pacific Trails Pipeline would bring fracked unconventional natural gas extracted from the Horn River Formation to Kitimat port for export. (Read more about this on pages 11 and 12.) The soon-to-be-released documentary *Fractured Land* tells the story of Caleb Behn, from the Treaty 8 territory in the Horn River Basin area, who visited the Maori people in New Zealand to share stories about community fights against fracking.

Governments say "no" to fracking

The Nova Scotia government recently implemented a de facto moratorium on hydraulic fracturing. In April, the government announced that it was extending its review of hydraulic fracturing to mid-2014, during which time no approvals would be issued. The new Quebec government has stated it intends to ban fracking in the province. There is currently a moratorium in place that prevents fracking exploration.

In mid-May, Vermont became the first American state to ban fracking when Peter Shumlin, Vermont's governor, signed a bill disallowing it. The Council of Canadians sent letters to the premiers across Canada urging them to follow suit.

International bans

Fracking is most prolific in the United States, with Canada following closely behind. Other countries that have natural gas reserves include China, Argentina, Mexico, South Africa and Australia. But as awareness continues to grow about the risks fracking poses to water and people, more countries are banning the practice.

In 2011 France became the first country in Europe to ban fracking. Alarmed by the stories of water pollution and documents detailing the toxic chemicals used for fracking in

the U.S., communities in France held rallies and posted anti-fracking signs across the country for months to pressure the government to impose a ban.

In January 2012, Bulgaria followed suit when lawmakers overwhelmingly voted to ban fracking across the country, including the Black Sea territorial waters. Before the decision was made, protesters marched to express their opposition to fracking in Dobrudja, Bulgaria's most fertile farm region, where community members feared that Chevron's plans to drill would contaminate the water and soil.

In South Africa, communities succeeded in getting the government to implement a moratorium to protect the Karoo region, one of the most remote and beautiful places in the country. The moratorium was to remain in place until the government's review on fracking was complete. Farmers, environmentalists, scientists, and families gathered recently demanding that the government uphold the moratorium on fracking. Unfortunately, the government lifted the moratorium in September, and the land is now open for drilling.

The state of Victoria in Australia recently joined the growing list of communities to say "no" to fracking. Protesters fear fracking of coal seam gas will threaten not only food and water sources, but also tourism, farming, dairy and wine industries.

We can stop fracking

The global anti-fracking movement is thriving. Nearly 100 organizations from France, Spain, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and other countries around the world signed the statement "For a Future without Fracking!" at the People's Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, this past June. On September 22, communities across six continents participated in the first-ever "Global Frackdown," organizing more than 125 events calling for a ban on fracking.

For more information about the Council of Canadians' campaign to stop fracking, visit our website at www.canadians.org/fracking.