



Doctors release new report calling for moratorium on fracking in Canada

Report by Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment highlights serious health and environmental dangers associated with fracked natural gas, including links to birth defects, cancer, air pollution, and global warming

Toronto, January 29, 2020 – The Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE) today released a new report calling for a moratorium on all new fracking development across Canada, along with the phase-out of existing fracking operations.

The report, “[Fractures in the Bridge: Unconventional \(Fracked\) Natural Gas, Climate Change and Human Health](#),” highlights the serious health and environmental dangers of fracking, a relatively new process used across North America to extract natural gas from reserves that are embedded in impermeable rock. These buried natural gas reserves are accessed by drilling deep horizontal wells and blasting water, sand, and toxic chemicals at high pressure through the rock, creating fractures in order to release the gas.

The frightening health impacts that have been associated with fracking and natural gas extraction include adverse reproductive outcomes, low birth weight, birth defects, and leukemia in children exposed in utero. Among the numerous environmental and safety impacts are increased climate emissions, release of toxic chemicals into air and water supplies, destruction of nature, social disruption of communities, and an increase in earthquakes.

Five provinces in Canada and six US states have adopted a moratorium on fracked gas, along with Bulgaria, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Uruguay, Northern Ireland, Scotland, England, and Wales.

“Credible science suggests that fracking is dangerous to our health and detrimental to our environment. We must urgently place a moratorium on all fracking in Canada to protect the health and safety of Canadians, and meet our emissions targets under the Paris Agreement,” says Dr. Éric Notebaert, CAPE Member and advisor on the report. Dr. Notebaert is an emergency physician in Montreal.

“Many adverse health effects have been identified in studies directed at fracking operations but the strongest evidence is for negative impacts on pregnancy and birth

outcomes and the aggravation of asthma,” he says. “The evidence for low birth weight is quite strong, which is disturbing, as low birth weight is an indicator for a number of serious health impacts including developmental deficits in children and increased rates of cardiovascular disease in later life. There is also reason to believe that fracking increases the risk of leukemia among children whose mothers are exposed during pregnancy.”

About two thirds of the natural gas produced globally over the last decade has been shale gas produced in Canada and the United States using fracking. In 2018, about 71 per cent of natural gas produced in Canada was unconventional gas from fracking. Most of that came from Northeastern BC. Natural gas is composed almost entirely of methane which is 86 times more powerful as a climate warming agent than carbon dioxide. Emerging evidence shows that much more methane is leaking from these fracking processes than was previously estimated.

“Fracking for natural gas in BC is catastrophic news for climate change,” says Dr. Larry Barzelai, family physician in Vancouver and CAPE Board Member. “Global methane levels have been steadily escalating over the last decade and new evidence points the finger at fracking.”

Fracking, which is a water-intensive exercise, can also put pressure on local water tables and contaminate water supplies. It involves the injection of chemicals – a number of which are very toxic – into the ground, which can result in contamination. Fracking also causes air pollutants to leak from the fractured rock, fracking wells, flares, and diesel equipment used for fracking.

Robin Edger, CAPE Executive Director, emphasizes that we can no longer treat natural gas as a bridge fuel to a carbon neutral economy.

“Natural gas is a fossil fuel that is feeding the climate crisis, compromising our ability to meet our commitments under the 2015 Paris Agreement, and threatening our ability to avoid catastrophic levels of climate change,” Edger says. “Fracking threatens our health and is contributing to climate change. The only responsible step for government is to ban it outright.”

To download the report, visit: <https://cape.ca/cape-fracking-report-en/>

To download a backgrounder, visit: <https://cape.ca/cape-fracking-bkg-en/>

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