

**Letter from CHEM Trust to UK Department of Energy and Climate Change  
(dated 25<sup>th</sup> July)**



Dear Sir/Madam,

I write to take issue with a public statement made by the Rt. Hon Michael Fallon MP (Minister of State at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Minister of State at the Department for Energy and Climate Change). On 19<sup>th</sup> July, the news at 1 o'clock on BBC Radio 4 had an article on tax breaks for shale gas exploration, which included an interview with the Rt. Hon Michael Fallon MP who categorically stated that "there is no evidence that hydraulic fracturing has contaminated water."

I attach two peer reviewed publications from US scientists which indicate the contamination of water sources near to fracking operations in the USA. Overall, data suggest that some home-owners living less than 1 km from gas wells have drinking water contaminated with gases, including methane.

Therefore, I feel that it is misleading to the public, for a Minister to say that there is no evidence, and I would be grateful for a response from the Rt. Hon Michael Fallon, or his office, on this issue.

Yours faithfully,

Gwynne Lyons  
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**Attachments:**

Jackson RB, Vengosh A, Darrah TH, Warner NR, Down A, Poreda RJ, Osborn SG, Zhao K, Karr JD. 2013. [Increased stray gas abundance in a subset of drinking water wells near Marcellus shale gas extraction.](#) Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A: doi: 10.1073/pnas.1221635110.

Osborn SG, Vengosh A, Warner NR, Jackson RB. 2011. [Methane contamination of drinking water accompanying gas-well drilling and hydraulic fracturing.](#) PNAS 108(20): 8172-8176.

**Department of Energy & Climate Change**  
3 Whitehall Place  
London  
SW1A 2AW

**Response from UK Department of Energy and  
Climate Change**

[www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

**Our ref:** TO2013/14321/RL

7 August 2013

Dear Ms Lyons,

Thank you for your email dated 25 July, about shale gas. I have been asked to reply.

The Government believes that shale gas has the potential to provide the UK with greater energy security, growth and jobs. We are therefore encouraging safe and environmentally sound exploration to determine this potential. The reports from US regulators and review bodies do confirm that gas developments there have, on occasion, led to water contamination. There are relatively few confirmed instances of this - most complaints on investigation have proved to be attributable to causes other than gas production. Contamination associated with gas production is generally associated with unsatisfactory cementing of wells, or spills or leakages of chemicals at the surface. These confirm the need for the industry to consistently apply good practice; as well as the need for proper scrutiny and oversight of the industry to ensure that this good practice is actually being carried out. But no case has yet come to light in which it has been confirmed that fracking has contaminated an aquifer.

Here, in the UK, we have learnt lessons from the US and elsewhere. We have a strong regulatory system that provides a comprehensive and fit for purpose regime for exploratory activities, but we want to continue to improve it. The UK has over 50 years of experience of regulating the onshore oil and gas industry nationally. There are regulations in place to ensure on-site safety, prevent water contamination, air pollution and mitigate seismic activity.

The Environment Agency takes a risk-based approach to the regulation of the use of chemicals in shale gas fracking activities and will assess the permitting requirements for each proposal on a site-by-site basis, considering the design of the operations and its proximity to ground and surface waters. If information comes to light that suggests there is a risk to groundwater the Environment Agency can serve a prohibition notice on the operator. For the drilling process, the Health and Safety Executive initially scrutinises the well design for safety and then monitors the

operations on the well to determine if the operator is conducting operations in accordance with the requirements.

We understand concerns about potential risks to water supplies. The Environment Agency will scrutinise all proposals to ensure that water supplies are properly protected.

They have powers to impose conditions to ensure proper protection or to prohibit activities which they consider to pose unacceptable risks. Their permission is also required for any water abstraction, and this will only be given where the proposed quantities are sustainable.

There have also been concerns about non-disclosure of chemicals used in frac fluids. The agencies have powers to require full disclosure of chemicals used in fracking in England and Wales. All chemicals an operator proposes to use will be assessed, and will not be permitted if they are considered to be harmful in the relevant circumstances.

Last year, the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Royal Society conducted an independent review of the scientific and engineering evidence on the risks associated with hydraulic fracturing for shale gas. They concluded that the risks can be managed effectively in the UK, provided that operational best practices are implemented and enforced through regulation.

If you have further questions about the environmental impacts of the proposed drilling, including questions about emissions and the protection of water sources, you should contact the Environment Agency, who is responsible for regulating water and environmental matters. Contact the National Customer Contact Centre on: 03708 506 506 (Mon-Fri, 8am - 6pm) or e-mail: [ssdenquires@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:ssdenquires@environment-agency.gov.uk)

If you have access to the internet and are interested in further information about unconventional oil and gas drilling, you might be interested to see some Q&A material available on the Government website here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/providing-regulation-and-licensing-of-energy-industries-and-infrastructure/supporting-pages/developing-shale-gas-and-oil-in-the-uk>

I hope that this is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Ross Lewis  
**DECC Correspondence Unit**