

Slaying the faulty studies: DOE's "happy thought" "study"

by Steve Coffman, New York

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The good news was so good that the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) couldn't wait to tell the world. ["Federal hydrofracking study shows no contamination of drinking water in Pennsylvania!"](#) the Associated Press dutifully headlined the DOE study that proved nothing of the kind.

What the article actually documented was that, from a sample of **one** out of tens of thousands of fracked Pennsylvania wells, "preliminary: results from an "ongoing study" found no fracking chemical markers in the drinking water above.

The article quotes [Duke University scientist Rob Jackson](#), who was not involved with the study. "He called it a 'useful and important approach' to monitoring fracking, but he cautioned that the single study doesn't prove that fracking can't pollute, since geology and industry practices vary widely in Pennsylvania and across the nation."

Later in the article, "Jackson wondered whether the unidentified drilling company might have **consciously or unconsciously** taken extra care with the research site, since it was being watched. He also noted that other aspects of the drilling process can cause pollution, such as poor well construction, surface spills of chemicals and wastewater."

It should be noted that Dr. Jackson was part of a [peer-review Duke University study](#) that found "evidence that natural gas escaped from some wells near the surface and polluted drinking water in northeastern Pennsylvania." Jackson's suggestion that DOE may have cherry-picked its sole-studied well, or that the unnamed gas company may have led DOE to a pre-selected sample is cautionary indeed.

If this seems unjustly conspiratorial, consider that the DOE study was conducted by the [National Energy Technological Laboratory \(NETL\)](#). So **who** are they?

Well, NETL just happens to be owned and operated by DOE, and its mission, as stated on its own website asserts that:

"NETL implements a broad spectrum of energy and environmental research . . . **enabling** domestic coal, **natural gas**, and oil."

Certainly no reason to look for conflict of interest there! It is interesting, though, that the "preliminary result of this ongoing study" should be seen as so groundbreaking that it required an immediate press conference and PR interview with Kathryn "Fracking-Queen" Klaber. Or that it was released to all major news outlets despite the disclaimer near the end of the article:

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"On Friday, DOE spokesman David Anna added that while nothing of concern has been found thus far, 'the results are far too preliminary to make any firm claims.'"

So, I guess "**Federal hydrofracking study shows no contamination of drinking water in Pennsylvania**" isn't a firm scientific claim then, but just a corporate happy thought.

Well, thanks, DOE, for the terrific sneaky preview. And, for what it's worth, in my preliminary opinion you're doing a crackerjack job of fulfilling your mission---to enable the gas industry, despite the facts or good scientific method.

--Steve Coffman 7/23/13

Thanks Steve, for uncovering and writing about this and offering it to our website.