



The Most Trusted Maim in News

CNN uses Binghamton HF hearings as launch point for day-long primal scream against shale gas – but how much of it actually squares up with the facts?

In a day and age when polarized, opinion-based journalism is both in demand and on the rise, [CNN](#) prides itself on being “the only credible, nonpartisan voice left” among its competitors in the cable news space. “Our mission, our mandate,” CNN president Jonathan Klein told [The New York Times](#) this spring, “is to deliver the best journalism in the world. No bias, no agenda.” It’s a philosophy, he added, that “puts us in a category of one.”

Of course, we can think of at least one other category in which CNN finds itself alone today: No other station has reported on the emergence of the shale gas revolution in American with the degree of volume and vitriol as the Cable News Network. Run the numbers yourself: ABC has done two stories on the issue. [CBS](#) has done three. [FOX News](#) has filed fewer than four. Best we can tell, MSNBC’s only done one. But CNN? Yesterday alone, it did seven separate segments on hydraulic fracturing (some of them on loop) -- and during the run-up to the HBO premiere of GasLand, about a half-dozen more. Incidentally, both HBO and CNN are owned by Time Warner. But only a cynic would ascribe any significance to that.

Whatever its motivation, CNN yesterday spent the better part of the day filing reports on EPA’s [fracturing forum in Binghamton](#), the fourth in a series of “public information sessions” hosted by the agency to solicit public comment on the scope of its upcoming study on hydraulic fracturing, the second such study EPA is pursuing on this in the past six years.

But Binghamton was only the foot in the door: The real focus of the day’s agenda was on providing opponents of responsible shale gas development a platform to advance a mythology on the dangers of fracturing, notwithstanding its 60-year track record of safe operations, and its increasingly critical role in delivering on the promise and potential of shale – which is already responsible for generating [tens of](#)

[thousands of family-supporting jobs](#) and billions in annual revenue for landowners and governments from the northern tip of Michigan all the way down to the southern border of Texas.

Unfortunately, not much of that story found its way into the hours of CNN coverage yesterday – although, in fairness, the network did extend an invitation to EID (which we were happy to accept) [to lend its perspective](#) to a segment pitting us against GasLand star Josh Fox. Aside from some early technical difficulties, we felt like we were given equal time and a fair shake on that. Regrettably, though, the rest of the day’s proceedings turned out to be a different kettle of fish. Below we examine some of the assertions made in these CNN segments, and then see how they fare when juxtaposed with the actual facts.

“This Is CNN” And These Are “The Facts”
<p>Segment lead-in: “The massive gas explosion in California last week is a reminder that this is an energy source that comes with risks. Drilling for natural gas has become a very big business in many parts of the country, but it can also have a negative impact on the people who live near that drilling. ... This is a troubling look at this industry.”(CNN segment intro, Jim Acosta)</p>	<p>FACT: The explosion that occurred last week in California was the result of a ruptured pipeline, not an incident at a natural gas development site.</p> <p>According to reports, the pipeline in question was more than 50 years old, laid down long before shale became a significant source of natural gas.</p> <p>Whether a pipeline is carrying oil, natural gas, water, sewage or biofuels, pressure is the key to making them work – and when pipeline incidents occur, pressure is what causes the damage.</p>
<p>“The controversy is over how they’re getting this natural gas out of the ground in Pennsylvania, and whether or not this type of drilling [fracturing] shouldbe extended to other parts of the northeast.”</p> <p>(CNN’s Drew Griffin, 0:39)</p>	<p>FACT: Hydraulic fracturing is not a “type of drilling” process. It’s a post-drilling well-stimulation process that’s been used safely and consistently in Pennsylvania, New York and other energy producing states for more than a half-century.</p> <p>Over the 40-year lifetime of a producing natural gas well, the fracturing process typically takes place over the course of a two to five day window. Once complete, the production site shrinks to the size of a two-car garage.</p>
<p>“The gas bubbles through his well [in Dimock, Pa.] ... what’s causing this? He says, like a lot of people in rural, eastern Pennsylvania, he has been ‘fracked.’”</p> <p>(CNN segment #1, Griffin, 1:35)</p>	<p>FACT: Lifelong resident of Dimock tells a different story:</p> <p>“It’s never going to clear up to crystal clear, no-methane-water because it wasn’t like that before the gas companies got here. There has been methane in the water for years. There’s a lady, and she’s 70 years old, they used to scurry into school and light the drinking fountain on fire. ... Seventy years ago they weren’t drilling around here.”</p> <p>PA Dept. of Environmental Protection (DEP): “A lot of folks relate the situation in Dimock to a fracking</p>

“This area is seeing a boom in the natural gas business because of ... a drilling process called hydraulic fracturing. ‘Fracking’ as it’s known, drills down and then sideways into the massive shale rock ... which cause mini-earthquakes.”

(CNN segment #1, Griffin, [2:00](#))

“What Craig and Julia Sautner want most now is to warn people in other areas, especially New York State, where this hydraulic fracturing is being proposed.”(CNN segment #1, Griffin,[4:12](#))

Josh Fox: “The [fracturing] process, I found out also, was exempted from the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the Superfund law, that it was completely de-regulated under the Bush administration, and that this is a scandal.”(CNN segment #2, Josh Fox, [1:05](#))

Fox misses again: “The natural gas in the water, which has been confirmed as thermogenic; it’s only coming from those deep shale layers in Colorado and Pennsylvania.”

(CNN segment #2, Fox, [4:59](#))

problem. I just want to make sure everyone's clear on this – **that it isn't. ... It wasn't a fracking problem.**”

FACT: Hydraulic fracturing, as mentioned, has nothing to do with the (vertical or horizontal) drilling process.

As for the charge that it causes “mini-earthquakes”? That’s been debunked by the NY Dept. of Environmental Conservation ([DEC](#)):

“**No blast or explosion is created by the hydraulic fracturing process.** The proppant holds the fractures open, allowing hydrocarbons to flow into the wellbore after injected fluids are recovered.” (DEC SGEIS, [page 127](#))

FACT: Hydraulic fracturing has been used to help deliver energy resources to New York for 50 years.

NY DEC: “Well stimulation, including hydraulic fracturing, was expressly identified and discussed in the GEIS ... [DEC] **does not** ... find a significant environmental impact associated with this technology, **which has been in use in New York State for at least 50 years.**” (SGEIS, [page 4](#))

FACT: Demonstrably false. The industry is regulated under every single one of these laws — under provisions of each that are relevant to its operations. See [this fact sheet](#) for a fuller explanation.

For its part, hydraulic fracturing has never in its 60-year history been regulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). It has, however, been regulated aggressively by the states.

Legislation clarifying Congress’s intent with respect to hydraulic fracturing and SDWA was passed in 2005 with the support of nearly three-quarters of the U.S. Senate ([74 “yea” votes](#)), **including the top Democrat on the Energy Committee, current Interior secretary Ken Salazar, and President Obama.** In the U.S. House, [75 Democrats joined 200 Republicans](#) in supporting the final bill, including the top Democratic members on both the Energy & Commerce and Resources Committees.

FACT: Wrong again. In Colorado, click [here](#)(Markham), [here](#) (Bracken) and [here](#) (McClure) to access reports from state environment regulators who found methane in tested water wells to be “**biogenic [naturally occurring] in origin**” with “**no indications of oil & gas related impacts to water well.**”

In Pennsylvania, tests conducted by a major local operator of more than 1,500 water sources indicated that one in three private water supplies had detectable levels of naturally occurring methane (no drilling in the

area), and one out of four water sources didn't meet one or more of EPA's drinking water standards. Those findings [match the conclusions](#) of a report issued by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania in 2009.

[More than 20,000 water wells](#) are drilled in Pa. every year, with no regulations on the books governing the process. Incidentally, today -- Sept. 14 -- is National "[Protect Your Groundwater](#)" Day.

As it relates to the charge of HF-related contamination in Pa., click [here](#) (Dimock) and [here](#) (Eakin) to access DEP's findings debunking those claims.

This came from the *reporter*?

"You have a tough, uphill battle, I'm telling you, when you see people lighting their faucets on fire; I myself have witnessed it, **it is remarkable to think that there is no link between the two**, but you're saying there's not. Let's see what the EPA says."

(CNN segment #2, Griffin, [7:24](#))

FACT: Actually, the battle isn't quite as "tough" as you'd think when you've got science, independent analysis, and 60-years of supporting history on your side.

[DEP \(2009\)](#): "Responding to recent concerns expressed by residents of Dimock Township, [DEP] has collected dozens of water supply samples in the Carter Road area and determined that nearby gas well **hydro fracturing activity has not impacted local wells.**"

[DEP \(2010\)](#): "A lot of folks relate the situation in Dimock to a fracking problem. I just want to make sure everyone's clear on this – **that it isn't.**"

[DEP \(2010\)](#): "DEP says it also has been **unable to verify any contamination** cases in the state caused by drilling, even though much of the public believes otherwise. 'It is counter to a perception **and it's unfortunate,**' [DEP's] Humphreys said. 'We really need to be sure that people are seeing the data that we're seeing.'

[EPA \(1995\)](#): "[G]iven the horizontal and vertical distance between the drinking water well and the closest methane gas production wells, the possibility of contamination or endangerment of [underground sources of drinking water] is **extremely remote.**"

[EPA \(2004\)](#): "Although thousands of ... methane wells are fractured annually, EPA did not find confirmed evidence that drinking water wells have been contaminated by hydraulic fracturing fluid injection."

[EPA \(2009\)](#): Sen. Inhofe: "Do any one of you know of one case of ground water contamination that has resulted from hydraulic fracturing?" [Peter Silva, EPA asst. administrator for water](#): "Not that I'm aware of, no." [Cynthia Giles, EPA asst. administrator for compliance](#): "I understand there's some anecdotal evidence [sic.], but I don't know that it's been firmly established." [Inhofe](#): "So the answer is no, you don't know of it." **Cynthia Giles nods.**

[EPA \(2010\)](#): "I have no information that states aren't doing a good job already,' Steve Heare, director of EPA's Drinking Water Protection Division said on the sidelines of a state regulators conference here. He also said despite claims by environmental organizations, **he hadn't seen any documented cases that the hydro-fracking process was contaminating water supplies.**"