



PSR Position Statement Calling for a Ban on Hydraulic Fracturing May 2016

We and all the nations of the world face choices about energy that will determine the health and livability of the planet. Our reliance on fossil fuels has heated the air and the oceans and destabilized weather patterns worldwide. Climate change, driven by fossil fuel combustion, has already damaged human health, animal and plant species, food and water sources and international security, and projections are that worse is to come. Extraction, processing and combustion of fossil fuels have also contaminated our air, water and land. These harms to our health and threats to our future from fossil fuel use must be stopped.

The answer lies in a family of renewable energy technologies that tap into natural cycles and systems, turning the ever-present energy around us into usable forms. These solutions to our energy needs would minimize depletion of our natural resources and reduce destruction of our environment, while providing tangible benefits to human health. As we transition from our current fossil fuel-dependent energy policy, the transition is guided by these principles: Minimize negative impacts on health and the environment in our energy production and use.

In light of these concerns, **Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) calls for a ban on hydraulic fracturing**, also known as “hydrofracking” or “fracking.” In speaking of hydraulic fracturing, PSR refers both to the hydraulic fracturing technique itself, used to extract natural gas and other fossil fuels from underground formations, and to associated processes for natural gas extraction, including road building, pad clearing, truck trips, drilling, cementing, compressors, pipelines, as well as the production of flowback waters, produced waters, off-gassing, fugitive emissions, releases of methane into the atmosphere, etc. Subsequent references to “fracking” refer to this entire process.

The threats to health associated with fracking include industrial-scale water consumption and contamination; air pollution, particularly by volatile organic compounds (VOCs); seismic effects; and the generation and management of large quantities of toxic liquid waste. In addition, fracking’s long-term impacts on freshwater aquifers are a significant threat to our limited drinking water supplies.

At the same time, PSR has become increasingly concerned about methane, the principal constituent in natural gas. Methane is a greenhouse gas far more potent at trapping heat than carbon dioxide – 86 times more potent over its first 20 years in the atmosphere, precisely the

time frame during which we must reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to sustain a healthy, livable planet. Research conducted over the past several years has documented that considerable amounts of methane escape into the atmosphere at numerous points in the life cycle of natural gas: from fracked wells; from the hundreds of miles of pipelines that move fracked gas from the wellsite; from the compressor stations that keep the gas moving through the pipes; and from storage facilities, as was made clear by the catastrophic leak from a storage facility in California, where the enormous methane releases required mass evacuations. Even the infrastructure that delivers natural gas for home cooking and heating has been shown to leak. All of these leaks increase emissions of this potent greenhouse gas, thus intensifying climate change and placing our world in greater jeopardy.

We cannot stay healthy in an unhealthy environment. Nor can we survive indefinitely on a planet growing hotter and more prone to extreme, unpredictable and destructive weather. These factors impel PSR to call for a **ban on fracking** and for a **rapid transition to cleaner, healthier, carbon-free sources of energy**.

As we make that transition, the oil and gas industry must make significant changes in their operations. These changes would include (although would not be limited to) the following:

- Full and timely disclosure to the public of the chemicals and chemical mixtures, including formulas, they use in hydraulic fracturing; of the amount of waste generated by their operations, and of the waste management procedures utilized for disposing of those wastes.
- Industry must promulgate and execute appropriate strategies to manage safely the threats to health and the environment that arise at all stages of the hydraulic fracturing process, including climate change-accelerating releases of methane into the atmosphere. The costs of such health-protective measures should be assumed by the industry that makes them necessary and should not be paid by the general public.
- Independently conducted, thorough water testing of nearby representative water supplies and of public bodies of water (streams, lakes, bays, etc.) before, during and after fracking occurs, and full and timely disclosure to the public of the findings of this testing.