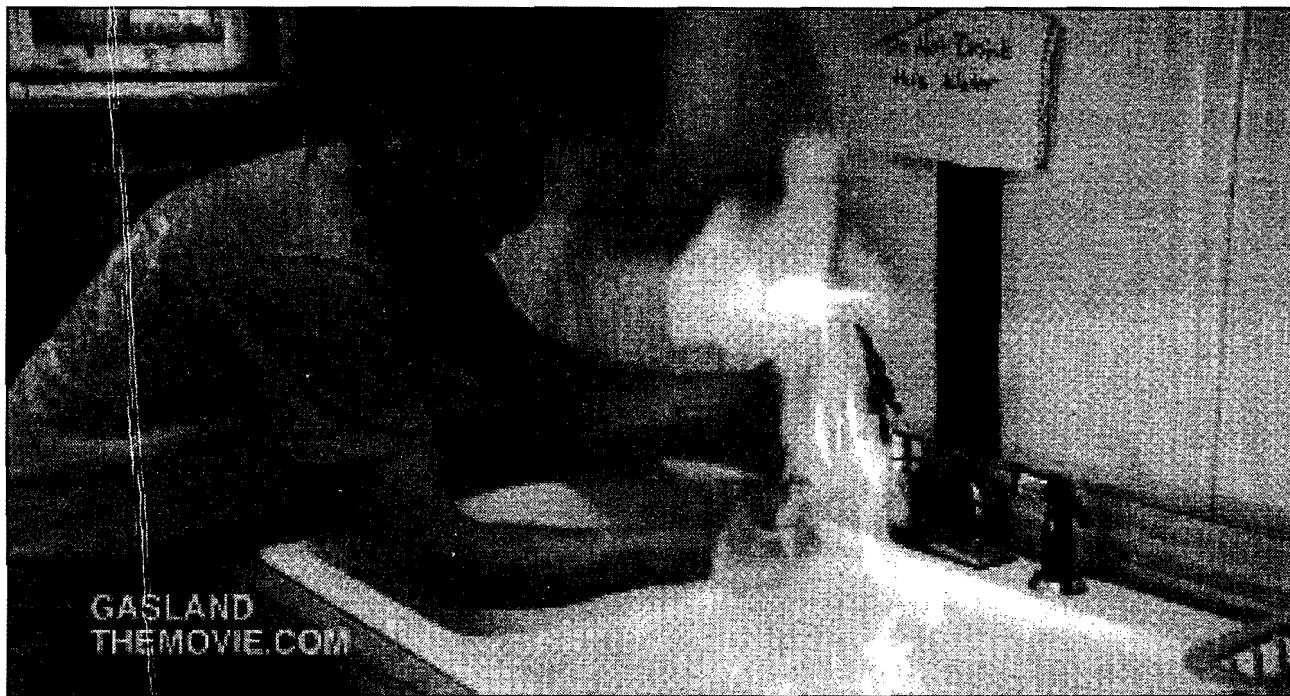


Cary's *GASLAND* screening warns of Marcellus shale drilling

By Carola Lott

GASLAND



A scene from Gasland.

Photo courtesy of GaslandTheMovie.com.

When a natural gas company offered Josh Fox's family \$100,000 to lease their land for natural gas exploration, Fox reacted in an unusual way: he picked up a camera and began asking questions. The result was an award-winning documentary on the dangers of natural gas fracking, a growing grassroots campaign to put a lengthy if not permanent moratorium on the practice, and a movie watching tour that took him last Tuesday to a packed house at the Cary Arboretum.

The Fox's land is located in Pennsylvania's Delaware River Basin, just across the border from upstate New York. It lies atop the Marcellus Shale (the energy companies call it the "Saudi Arabia of natural gas"), a vast geological formation that stretches from New York through Pennsylvania to Virginia, and as far west as Ohio, allegedly containing 50 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

Drilling in the Marcellus Shale would mostly take place at depths

greater than 2,000 feet where the rock is extremely tight, making gas exploration and extraction both difficult and expensive. However, new technology, principally hydraulic fracturing known as "fracking," which is legal in New York, make drilling possible and this area desirable to exploration companies.

Fracking involves pumping fluid down the well under high pressure to create fractures in the gas-bearing rock, a process that requires prodigious quantities of water - more than one million gallons per well. A mix of chemical compounds that include arsenic, mercury and volatile compounds like benzene, ethyl benzene, toluene and xylene, is added to the water with sand to make the shale give up the locked-in gas.

As he travels across the country visiting states studded with natural gas drilling rigs, Fox documents horror story after horror story that illustrate how the continent-wide explosion of fracking projects threatens watersheds

and river basins, the source of drinking water. The people he interviews recount tragic stories of unexplained illnesses that have afflicted them ever since drilling began where they live. In addition, Fox shows heartrending images of animals that have lost most of their hair and so much weight that they are little more than skin and bones - all from drinking the toxic chemicals that have leached into the groundwater. To graphically prove his point, Fox shows people using matches to set their water on fire as it comes out of the tap.

Some people refused to share their stories, especially in communities with local economies that depend on the oil and gas industry. Others have moved away after their homes were purchased by energy companies, but had to sign agreements prohibiting them from telling their stories. As Fox says, the companies "are purchasing those they contaminate."

The movie shows Fox leaving messages with energy companies,

like Halliburton, where he talks to recordings or voices that never seem to return his calls. Drilling companies exist in "a regulatory void" designed, says Fox, by Richard Cheney and a high level conference of energy company officials convened shortly after he was first elected Vice-President. What they managed to achieve, when no one was looking, was a carte blanche exemption from the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts for the gas drilling industry.

Public right-to-know provisions under the Emergency Planning do not cover the oil and gas industry and Community Right-to-Know Act, so drilling companies withhold information needed to make informed decisions about protecting the environment and human health.

In a scene that would be hilarious if it were not so enraging, industry leaders testifying before Congress try to squirm out of disclosing what chemicals they use in the fracking process. When they are finally forced to reveal the list of substances used, the list reads like a catalogue of what you don't ever want to drink, breathe or touch. It's a long list of toxic substances, many with carcinogenic properties including endocrine disrupters, some that affect reproduction.

According to the film, these chemicals can appear in the water table after they're injected into the shale.

Currently, the New York Department of Environmental Conservation is preparing the final Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement to assess issues unique to horizontal drilling and high-volume hydraulic fracturing of the Marcellus Shale and other reservoirs of natural gas.

While there is a perception that there has been an official moratorium against fracking in New York State until the study is completed, Yancey Roy of the DEC told *The Independent* this is not the case. However, a bill imposing a moratorium was passed out of an Assembly committee last week and was referred to the Rules Committee.

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Companies could apply for drilling permits providing they undertake a site-specific environmental review consistent with the requirements of the State Environmental Quality Review Act and the state Environmental Conservation Law. Once the DEC's generic statement is final, then companies will be relieved of the obligation of doing a site-specific review as they will subject to the generic statement. The contents of the generic statement will, therefore, be of critical importance.

As they are presently drafted, the guidelines are stricter than those in effect in any other state. Moreover, they stipulate that every applicant must disclose what chemicals they intend to use for each well. Bills requiring such disclosure are pending in Albany.

Fox stressed the need for citizen's groups to come together to protect their health and their drinking water before it is too late. Once aquifers have been polluted, no one knows if they can be cleaned, he warned.

GASLAND will be shown Monday, June 21, on HBO at 9 p.m. A website devoted to this subject is nyrad.org or gaslandthemovie.com.