

Fracking regulations essential for city health

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The Fort Collins Sustainability Group (FCSG) has serious concerns about oil and gas exploration and the use of hydraulic fracturing (fracking) within city limits. These concerns extend to more than just Fort Collins and are reasons for community and statewide action.

Oil and gas exploration and extraction, particularly when hydraulic fracturing is involved, is an intensive, 24/7, industrial operation. It is disruptive to both residential neighborhoods and commercial districts when conducted in close proximity to those areas. Most would agree that exploration and extraction impacts such as noise, traffic, high intensity nighttime lighting, dust generation, and 24-hour operations are incompatible with urban living and activities and pose a threat to urban infrastructure and amenities. Environmental concerns include releases of significant quantities of methane (a powerful greenhouse gas) unless special capture equipment is in place. There is a known impact to air quality from toxic air emissions associated with drilling. Hydraulic fracturing also impacts the quality of both surface and ground water and consumes large amounts of water—a limited resource in our semi-arid area.

In response to these issues, FCSG believes that the City of Fort Collins city council should take the following steps, outlined below.

1. Require a rule change from the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC) that would require methane capture on all hydraulic fractured wells and require thorough cleaning of all water leaving the well site for all fracking operations within Fort Collins city limits.
2. Require that the COGCC hire and train sufficient personnel to inspect and monitor new and current well operations because it is especially important to inspect and ensure that drilling activities and producing wells do not contaminate ground water or harm air quality.
3. Finally, we would like to see the City of Fort Collins develop comprehensive regulations covering those aspects of oil and gas extraction not explicitly reserved to the authority of COGCC, including, but not limited to the emission of air pollutants from wells, excessive vehicle traffic and road impacts in the vicinity of oil or gas exploration activities or currently operating wells and impacts to noise and light levels, and dust generation.

To facilitate positive productive dialog and engagement with the COGCC, we urge the city to enter into an intergovernmental agreement with the COGCC for local inspection authority to help ensure that all state regulations are being followed and city and citizen interests of health, safety, infrastructure and environmental protection are followed.

Finally, to protect the health and safety of citizens of Fort Collins, the city should be prepared to impose a moratorium on oil and gas exploration within city limits if any application is made for a permit before new city regulations are put in place.

Without adequate regulation and enforcement, the extraction of natural gas will be damaging to both the environment and to human health and to the place we call Fort Collins. We urge that these concerns and recommendations are taken into account as the City of Fort Collins moves forward addressing oil and natural gas exploration within city limits.

We encourage readers to contact city council and ask them to support the steps we recommend for responsible fracking regulations that minimize health, safety, and infrastructure risks to Fort Collins citizens and that do not threaten our air or water.

Phil Friedman lives in Ft. Collins and is a member of the FCSG Steering Committee. Visit <http://fcsf.fccan.org/> for more information about FCSG.