



# Policy Position: Hydraulic Fracturing

**There is currently significant commercial interest in hydraulic fracturing operations (commonly known as ‘fracking’) in a number of locations in the United Kingdom.**

The process involves using deep drilling techniques coupled with the use of hydraulic pressure (through significant quantities of water and chemicals) to potentially release shale gas within the sub strata that could subsequently be used to provide energy.

In a global context major fracking operations are currently predominantly in North America. There are however a number of US States, and other countries elsewhere in the world, that have suspended the search for shale gas until research uncovers the potential long-term impacts upon human health and the environment.

There are a number of potential impacts that fracking could have upon both human health and the environment. These include:

- Environmental impacts (water use and pollution; air quality (including noise); land pollution)
- Geological impacts (seismic activity)
- Release of naturally occurring radioactive materials (NORMs)

There are also wider aspects to consider, including the impact that the process itself, and the subsequent use of the gas recovered contributes either positively or negatively towards reducing global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and associated climate change, along with wider environmental, social and economic sustainability considerations.

CIEH, whilst recognising the potential economic and energy benefits potentially associated with the technology, nonetheless believes that there is insufficient current evidence to confirm that all these potential risks can be suitably reduced and/or managed within acceptable levels.

**We therefore advocate that:**

- 1: The precautionary principle must remain the overriding principle for the UK at present. Given the lack of sufficient evidence relevant to the UK at present, we believe application of this principle means it would at present be inappropriate to commence commercial operations.
- 2: The evidence base as it relates to potential and actual environmental and human health impacts should be kept under regular review and must inform policy and decision-making. A comprehensive research programme should be commissioned for the UK.
- 3: If/when there is a satisfactory evidence base that suggests operations could safely commence without causing unacceptable adverse environmental, economic, public health or wider social impacts, government must ensure that there is an effective and adequately resourced regulatory monitoring regime in place to build public confidence.
- 4: A full, independent environmental impact assessment should be a prerequisite to any initial exploratory operations commencing.
- 5: Full land remediation must be a non-negotiable condition of any such approvals.

This policy position should be read in conjunction with our briefing paper “Shale gas and fracking – Examining the evidence”, jointly published with Scientists for Global Responsibility (SGR) in June 2014 available at <http://www.cieh.org/WorkArea/showcontent.aspx?id=53668>