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## Uranium Contamination New Hydrofracking Danger?

November 1, 2010 at 6:45 AM by [Paula Hay](#) · [4 Comments](#)

This is the kind of thing that concerns me about Marcellus drilling, and [that I mentioned previously](#). Because the type of drilling that's happening in the Marcellus formation is new, there is no body of data to tell us just what kind of damage we're doing and what we might need to do to mitigate that damage. We're learning as we go, and if we're not careful we may well do permanent damage to Pennsylvania and not even know it until it's too late.

Tracy Bank, PhD, assistant professor of geology at SUNY Buffalo, and her team have discovered that the hydrocarbons trapped in Marcellus shale are chemically bonded with uranium. When they subjected their shale samples to a lab-sized version of the fracking process, the uranium dissolved and was carried off in solution with the fracking fluids.

The upshot: hydrofracking may be releasing uranium into Pennsylvania's groundwater.

This is rather alarming, to say the least, but I'm not ready to set my hair on fire just yet. Bank's research was conducted entirely in a lab, and while it is rational to assume the same process is taking place at drilling sites around the state, no research has yet been done to determine whether this is the case or not. Additionally, many (most?) drilling companies keep their fracking recipes secret, and the information I've seen on this research doesn't spell out the chemical equation by which the uranium molecules are being cracked off the hydrocarbon molecules. It could be that some fracking solutions cause this to happen, while others don't.

It's also worth noting that radioactivity isn't the primary risk associated with uranium contamination at the levels Bank discovered. The danger here is heavy metals contamination — the same type of contamination seen with mercury in fish. It's still very dangerous, but Pennsylvania's waterways won't be glowing any time soon.



Dr. Tracy Bank of SUNY Buffalo. Image courtesy of University at Buffalo

Dr. Bank's research will be presented at the annual meeting of the Geological Society of America in Denver on Nov.

2. For more information, check out [the entire press release at Science Daily](#).

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[Friday, November 12, 2010 at 7:35 AM](#)

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In Denton, Tarrant and Wise counties, all kinds of equipment – from pipes and separators to frac and brine-hauling tanks – were decontaminated of NORM – the most toxic waste the wells can generate.

Texas Railroad Commission rules allow the industry to self-monitor for NORM, and many operators are slow to decontaminate the radioactive residue because of the cost, industry insiders say. Furthermore, only two of nearly 200 operators registered with the commission in the Barnett's core counties – Key Energy Services and Devon Energy – have provided for such decontamination in the past two years.

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