

Californians: There Is Secret Fracking In Your Backyard

If you thought that only people in rural Pennsylvania were blessed with water that they can light on fire, think again. Fracking happens everywhere. You just don't know about it.



If you've seen *Gasland*, you're probably familiar with the hazards of the natural gas extraction process; look no further than states like Wyoming or Pennsylvania to see how the process can contaminate drinking water with toxic chemicals, cause hydrochloric acid spills, and trigger vegetation die-off.

Still, it's easy to ignore the oil and gas companies' egregious neglect of fracking safety when watching accidents happen from a distance. That's why **As You Sow**, a non-profit that uses shareholder influence to pressure big companies into becoming more environmentally responsible, is trying to get

the word out that fracking is relevant everywhere--because there is fracking everywhere. In fact, the practice has been taking place in California, completely unregulated, for the past 50 years. And since it's unregulated, nobody really knows how many fracked wells there are in the state.

A lack of disclosure permeates the entire fracking process. The industry won't disclose what chemicals it uses, it won't test groundwater before, during, and after fracks, and in the case of California, it won't even say where it's fracking. "Oftentimes a company will frack a well, a person will say 'My water is now poisonous,' and the company says 'Oh, it was like that anyway,'" explains Andy Behar, CEO of **As You Sow**.

Shareholder pressure from **As You Sow** (including 41% of shareholders at Chevron and 28% at Exxon), has yielded FracFocus, a website that Behar calls "minimal and very sketchy." One key problem: The site only discusses wells drilled after January 1, 2011. As of 2007, there were 449,000 gas wells in 32 states.

Now **As You Sow** is pressuring the companies that drill in California, including Venoco and PDC Energy, to be more responsible. The first step in doing that is to raise awareness. Last week, **As You Sow** held a fundraiser in Venice, CA to bring attention to fracking in the state. "People down in L.A. were shocked. When they saw pictures of it in Culver City and Santa Barbara, they were like, 'Whoa, why don't we know about this?'" says Behar.

A quick look at FracFocus tells us that there were seven wells drilled in California since January 1 of this year. A sample site in Ventura County uses chemicals including phenol-formaldehyde resin (harmful when inhaled or swallowed) and 2-butoxy ethanol (a known carcinogen).

Even with all the shareholder pressure it can muster, there's only so much that **As You Sow** realistically can expect from the companies that frack in California. "What I think will happen is that companies will do the bare minimum that we requested until they get so much pressure that they just can't go on," says Behar. "We're going to start seeing revolts in local communities where this is happening." Unfortunately, it might take a big fracking accident in California for residents to revolt enough to truly change the system.