

# Clean Energy, Clean Water



**H**ydraulic fracturing (fracking) brings two of our most precious natural resources at odds. The natural gas harvested through the process is essential to meeting our country's growing energy needs (and is a source of clean energy at that). However, poorly constructed wells or improper disposal of wastewater from fracking operations can potentially affect drinking water quality. There have been reports of methane migrating from drilling operations into drinking water sources—contamination that not only could render water undrinkable, but also cause a potential explosion hazard.

Fracking has gained traction in recent years through its combination with horizontal drilling, which has made it more economical for extracting natural gas. The rapid expansion in drilling operations has led to concerns that development is outpacing environmental considerations. Some have even called for a moratorium on fracking until more research can be done on its environmental effects.

Thankfully, fracking has been receiving increasing regulatory attention. Some states, including Colorado, Wyoming, North Dakota and Texas, already regulate fracking. In May, the Illinois state legislature approved what the Associated Press called “the nation's toughest fracking regulations.”

According to the AP report, the Illinois legislation was created with the help of both industrial and environmental advocates. The bill contained many requirements meant to help protect the environment: Drilling companies must disclose which chemicals they use, test water before and after fracking, and would be responsible for any water pollution. (As of press time, Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn had not yet signed the bill, but had “promised” to do so.)

The federal government also is moving forward with fracking regulations. In May, the Department of the Interior released an updated draft proposal for safety standards for drilling on Indian and public lands. Like the Illinois legislation, it includes provisions requiring disclosure of chemicals used, and also requires that oil and gas operators have a water management plan in place to handle flow-back and ensure groundwater resources are not contaminated.

Additionally, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is conducting a research project to determine the potential impacts of fracking on drinking water resources. The results of the various research projects, however, are not expected to be available until late 2014—by which time many more wells could be in place.

Nonetheless, it is encouraging to see progress being made to ensure that we are able to access valuable natural gas while also keeping our water resources clean. Hopefully, between research and regulation, we will be able to harmonize our needs for both clean energy and clean drinking water.

## Top Projects

*Water Quality Products* is now accepting nominations for the 2013 Top Projects awards. To nominate your most unique or challenging residential, commercial or industrial projects, visit [www.wqpmag.com/top-projects-nomination](http://www.wqpmag.com/top-projects-nomination) to access the online submission form. Don't wait—the deadline is Aug. 30.

*Kate Cline*

Kate Cline, managing editor  
[kcline@sgcmail.com](mailto:kcline@sgcmail.com)

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**New Poll:** Your opinions on hydraulic fracturing

**2013 Top Water Quality Projects:** The online nomination form is now available; entries will be accepted through Aug. 30.

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# WATER QUALITY PRODUCTS

Scranton Gillette Communications Inc.  
3030 W. Salt Creek Ln., #201, Arlington Heights, IL 60005-5025  
tel: 847.391.1000 • fax: 847.390.0408

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[wqpeditor@sgcmail.com](mailto:wqpeditor@sgcmail.com)

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**Integrated Media Consultant** Don Heidkamp  
[dheidkamp@sgcmail.com](mailto:dheidkamp@sgcmail.com) 847.391.1047  
**Classified Ad Sales Manager** Donna Aly  
[daly@sgcmail.com](mailto:daly@sgcmail.com) 480.941.0510, ext.13  
**Reprint Coordinator** Adrienne Miller  
[amiller@sgcmail.com](mailto:amiller@sgcmail.com) 847.391.1036  
**List Rental Contact** Geoffrey Gardner  
845.201.5331  
**Advertising Coordinator** Lucia Currans  
[lcurrens@sgcmail.com](mailto:lcurrens@sgcmail.com) 847.391.1005

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