

# Shale gas fracking a low risk to public health -UK review

*The risks to public health from emissions caused by fracking for shale oil and gas are low as long as operations are properly run and regulated, the British government's health agency said on Thursday.*

**Kate Kelland, Reuters, 10-31-13**

Public Health England (PHE) said in a review that any health impacts were likely to be minimal from hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, which involves the pumping of water and chemicals into dense shale formations deep underground.

Environmental campaigners have staged large anti-fracking protests in Britain, arguing that it can pollute groundwater and cause earthquakes.

Since there is currently no fracking in Britain, the PHE report examined evidence from countries such as the United States, where it found that any risk to health was typically due to operational failure.

"The currently available evidence indicates that the potential risks to public health from exposure to emissions associated with the shale gas extraction process are low if operations are properly run and regulated," said John Harrison, director of PHE's center for radiation, chemical and environmental hazards.

"Good well construction and maintenance is essential to reduce the risks of groundwater contamination," he added.

Britain's Conservative-led government, seeking a U.S.-style production boom to offset dwindling North Sea oil and gas reserves, has backed fracking as an "energy revolution" that could create jobs and cut energy prices.

Energy Minister Michael Fallon welcomed the report and said companies would be granted permission to frack for shale oil and gas in Britain only if their operations are considered to be safe.

"Public safety and health is paramount," he said, adding that the government would work with the industry "to ensure stringent safety guidelines are upheld" in shale exploration.

Green activist groups say the government should instead invest more in renewable energy.

"Low risk is not the same as no risk," said Friends of the Earth energy campaigner Helen Rimmer. "Evidence suggests fracking has contaminated drinking water in Australia and the United States. There's no guarantee it won't happen here."

Greenpeace said earlier this month it would encourage British landowners to join together in legally opposing fracking, a move that could strengthen the opposition to shale exploration and development.

Responding to the PHE's report, Quentin Fisher, a professor of petroleum geoengineering at the University of Leeds, said it was "yet another study" suggesting contamination of groundwater due to fracking was unlikely.

"The report provides even more evidence that production of gas from shale can be made very safe," he added.

Ken Cronin, chief executive of the UK Onshore Operators Group which represents the onshore oil and gas industry, also welcomed the report, saying he hoped its findings would "reassure communities up and down the country that shale gas can be extracted with minimal risk to their wellbeing".