

January 9, 2012

Marcia McNutt, PhD
Director
U.S. Geological Survey
12201 Sunrise Valley Drive
Reston, VA 20192

Dear Dr. McNutt:

I write to ask the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to investigate and quickly provide public information on the seismic impacts of hydraulic fracturing.

On New Year's Eve, a 4.0 magnitude earthquake occurred near Youngstown, Ohio. It appears that this was not a natural occurrence, but the result of a natural gas drilling process called hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking." Specifically, the disposal of fracking waste fluid may have put tremendous pressure on a local fault line triggering the earthquake. In response, Ohio officials have shut down five wells in the area where thousands of gallons of fracking waste fluid were being disposed of each day.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident. Similar earthquakes have occurred near other fracking sites in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Colorado. It is deeply concerning that a widespread practice in the United States may be causing earthquakes and reshaping our geology through its waste disposal.

Right now, communities across the country are facing critical decisions about whether to allow fracking. They deserve to know the risks associated with this type of drilling – particularly if it is being conducted without appropriate safeguards. The potential human health risks and environmental damage are already well documented, but the new threat of earthquakes makes the need to evaluate the seismic impact of fracking even more urgent.

USGS has a responsibility to help local communities and states assess the potential dangers resulting from fracking as soon as possible. While I recognize that USGS and others are currently evaluating this issue, I urge USGS to move forward quickly and provide the public with 1) an assessment of the science related to earthquakes caused by disposal of fracking waste fluids, 2) an evaluation of the current risk faced by communities where fracking activity is taking place, and 3) recommended strategies to prevent future earthquakes due to fracking.

Meeting America's energy needs should not come with the risk of danger to individuals and property. The recent earthquake in Ohio raises important questions that need to be answered. I look forward to hearing from you on how USGS is taking steps to address this issue and prevent future damage.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Laukenberg