

Fracking risks, fact or fiction?

February 17 2012

A Simon Fraser University researcher known for his expertise on naturally occurring hazards will participate Friday in a shake down of the truth about a new form of human-induced earthquakes.

John Clague, an [earth sciences](#) professor, will discuss documented connections between [shale gas](#) development and earthquakes at a [symposium](#) during the 2012 American Association for the Advance of Science (AAAS) conference in Vancouver.

The conference is Feb. 16-20 at the Vancouver Convention Centre (VCC).

Clague's presentation, [Hydraulic Fracturing and Earthquakes in Western Canada](#), on Feb. 17, is part of [Hydraulic Fracturing of Shale: Building Consensus Out of Controversy](#), a three-hour symposium.

Hydraulic fracturing involves the injection of fluids at high pressure into horizontally drilled holes in shale, to create fractures in rock and release natural gas.

The controversial practice has on the one hand, the potential to unleash previously inaccessible natural gas that could provide North America with a relatively clean, affordable source of energy for the next 100 years or more.

On the other hand, some scientists fear hydraulic fracturing could contaminate groundwater, worsen air quality and trigger seismic activity.

Clague stresses the known science behind what potentially causes [hydraulic fracturing](#) to trigger earthquakes is so new there are no published studies on the phenomenon.

However, Clague's overview of documented observations of spatial and temporal coincidences between fracturing and earthquakes east of the Rocky Mountains near Fort Nelson, B.C. underscore the need for more research, especially in [earthquake](#) prone areas.

“To my knowledge, the Horn River area of northeastern B.C., which is an example in my talk of where fracking coincides with earthquakes, is not particularly earthquake prone,” says Clague.

“Yet there are documented observations in this area of fluid pressures causing rocks that are near the threshold of failure to slip, triggering earthquakes. Crustal rocks can be brought to the point of failure by natural forces.”

Provided by Simon Fraser University

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