

Scotland leads unconventional gas extraction health assessments

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Scotland can lead the international public health impact assessment of unconventional gas extraction (UGE), according to a new report by University of Stirling academics.

The Scottish Government announced a moratorium on the controversial extraction processes which includes fracking, [coal bed methane](#) and underground coal gasification, until it publishes a full assessment of the technology.

Now, detailed research by Stirling academics Professor Andrew Watterson and Dr Will Dinan, outlines the complexities such an assessment presents and how Scotland can set the benchmark for other nations.

Professor Watterson, Head of the University's Occupational and Environmental Health Research Group (OEHRG), said: "Scotland could be the testing ground for a pioneering international approach to health impact assessment of UGE by governments as we don't have any previous extraction projects in Scotland, meaning it won't be a retrospective approach.

"And crucially, the assessment proposed by the Scottish Government, which should adopt a cautious approach, will examine not just an individual application, but take a nationwide perspective. Public health, energy development and global climate change are now all in the mix.

"The majority of previous assessments have been conducted on behalf of the UGE industry by paid commercial consultants. This presents a serious scientific, technical, legal, ethical and democratic challenge for governments. Communities can rarely afford to commission these assessments and may consider them biased when commissioned by vested interests.

"Equitable and ethical principles are urgently needed to ensure the integrity and probity of the emerging regulatory system and to address concerns about what appear to be unregulated practitioners."

The research, published today in the health policy journal *New Solutions*, examined existing [health impact](#) assessments from across the world, including reports from various UN and EU agencies.

It studied the scientific research conducted so far, looking at exposures and potential effects of materials used in the fracking process and possibly released by the process in the short, middle and long term.

Co-author Dr Will Dinan, a lecturer in Communications and expert on lobbying and transparency, added: "It is vital any assessment is independent, rigorous and transparent. Hiring experts to influence planning and regulation is a well-tryed tactic and structural advantage exploited by the oil and gas industry in seeking license to operate."

Provided by University of Stirling

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