

Will Regulation Make 'Unconventional Gas' Safe?

The government message is that:

There have been problems in the USA and Australia but because Britain has "the best regulations in the world" we can do it safely here... The claim follows a *Royal Society/Royal Academy of Engineering Report* in 2012 which argued that 'fracking' could be done safely with appropriate regulations and best practice. The RS/RAE made 10 recommendations for better regulations and the government said that they supported these.

However, the government have subsequently followed only one recommendation (June 2014). Other recommendations have been opposed in practice - e.g. the RS/RAE proposed that risks be assessed across the entire cycle of gas development with mandatory Environment Impact Assessments. When something similar was proposed by the EU the government opposed it as too expensive. **Got that? Your safety is 'too expensive'!**

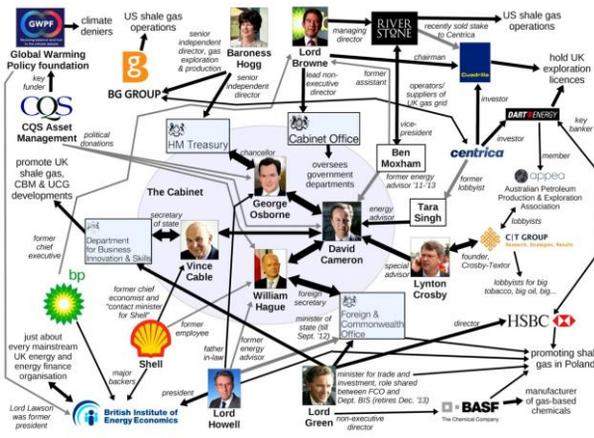
The Gas Industry co-opts its own regulation

Lord Browne's senior appointees:

4 appointees in senior positions in DEFRA, the ministry that oversees the regulators

3 appointees in senior positions in the Dept Energy and Climate Change

4 Senior appointees into the Treasury - including Baroness Hogg an independent director of the British Gas group to ensure financial support packages



Graphic by Paul Mobbs

A Two Faced Policy

In addition to opposing tighter EU regulations on shale gas the government have:

- Government **reduced the time to process waste permits from 3 to 6 months down to 2 weeks, cutting out the time for consultation and expert assessments**
- **Cut staffing at the Environment Agency**
- **Allowed companies to self-certify compliance**
- **Introduced planning guidance to force the hand of local planning authorities + incentivised planning authorities to permit development by allowing a higher tax take on gas developments**
- **Opposed making the so called "independent well assessor" really independent - they are effectively an employee of the drilling company**
- **Introduced proposals to take away local planning powers if permits not granted**

Spin World or Real World?

The British Government assumes an 'ideal world' in which hypothetical regulation and engineering solutions are assumed to prevail rather than normal gas field practices. An editorial in the *British Medical Journal* on 26th April 2014 describes how "The optimism that fail safe engineering solutions can ensure safe shale gas development may result more from a triumph of marketing than a demonstration of experience".

In other wordsthe government message is *PR spin*.

e.g. "It is assumed that current controls are enforced by regulators and followed by operators" (from a Consultation Document on Fracking prepared by AMEC for the DECC)....

Yet at the Daneshill exploratory well drilling company Dart ignored several planning conditions e.g. the requirement to build an access road to the site, while some planning conditions were never enforced, like the colour of the fence....

Notts County Council only has one enforcement officer for the whole county with plenty of other things to do!

