



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

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NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 30th January 2013

NFLA report considers whether shale gas and extraction is an 'energy solution' or an 'environmental nightmare'

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) publish today a report providing its member authorities with a thorough and detailed analysis of the energy and environmental implications of developing shale gas and extraction in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland. (1)

The report is part of a suite of forthcoming policy briefings which are informing its membership of a variety of critical energy issues which could impact on local government across the British Isles. Further reports on fuel poverty, energy efficiency, the Green Deal, the benefits of biofuels and geothermal energy, and the UK Energy Bill are all in preparation and will be published shortly.

The NFLA report on shale gas comes at a critical juncture in the development of this new form of gas extraction. In December 2012 the UK Government gave its view that it was 'safe' to extract shale gas from deep underground, and a number of potential planning applications are being put forward across England, Scotland and Wales (2). In Ireland a joint report considering the environmental risks is being developed for the Republic of Ireland Government and the Northern Ireland Government amidst proposed planning applications for extracting shale gas across north-west and west Ireland (3).

With the UK Government also increasing the amount of electricity it expects to be generated by gas and renewables in comparison to that by new nuclear power stations in the future, shale gas has been talked up as one of the answers for satisfying future energy need (4).

The key conclusions of the NFLA report are:

- (1) The main point in the NFLA briefing is that, even if exploiting these new sources of fossil fuels (shale gas) was proven to be 'safe', the impact of burning them on the climate is likely to topple us into the more negative scenarios of global warming put forward by climate change studies.
- (2) Even if some way were found to exploit unconventional gas in a way that meant it was only replacing coal, it would require much stricter regulation than currently appears to be the case.
- (3) There is concern that the inhalation of radioactive radon gas in shale gas could pose serious health risks. The NFLA will monitor further work being undertaken by the UK Health Protection Agency in this area.
- (4) The NFLA believe local authorities will need to build up an in-house expertise in this new area, even if they are only being consulted upon planned developments by central government.
- (6) Evidence from around the world indicates inherent and unacceptably high environmental and health risks associated with shale and CBM drilling – whether or not hydraulic fracturing takes place – particularly in relation to groundwater contamination with methane and fracking fluids.
- (6) Developing this industry and the strict regulation it will require is clearly a distraction – in the same way as new nuclear build – which the UK and the Republic of Ireland Governments and the Devolved Governments simply cannot afford to take when they are already trying to develop energy efficiency and renewable energy programmes.
- (7) Green gas, which fits much better with a local decentralised sustainable energy strategy, could provide around the same amount of gas as shale gas is expected to provide, but at a much cheaper price and without the same concerns over environmental damage and degradation.

NFLA Chair, Councillor Mark Hackett said:

"I welcome this briefing as providing local government with a detailed analysis of shale gas and extraction, a new form of energy that many Councils have had to consider through the planning

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process. The NFLA briefing shows that Councils should be concerned about the energy and environmental externalities that shale gas extraction could bring to their locality. I see shale gas as a distraction from a greater focus on developing renewable energy, community led microgeneration projects and energy efficiency programmes. If we are to develop gas as part of a future short term energy solution then the potential in green gas compared to shale gas is obvious without the unpleasant environmental damage that extraction would provide. I urge Councillors and senior Council officers to read this excellent briefing in developing their own policy towards shale gas and extraction."

NFLA Steering Committee Policy Advisor Pete Roche said:

"Local authorities around the UK and Ireland are taking action to bring about a vision of a sustainable energy future, tackle climate change and beat fuel poverty and many are finding such action can actually help meet budget shortfalls too. Shale gas proposals are a huge obstacle to achieving that vision and are clearly part of that group of technologies moving us ever closer to climate disaster."

Ends

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Notes to editors:

- (1) The NFLA Policy Briefing on shale gas and extraction is attached with this media release and will be placed on the NFLA website.
- (2) Click Green, 'The UK Government gives green light to fracking for shale gas', 13th December 2012, <http://www.clickgreen.org.uk/news/national-news/123846-uk-government-gives-green-light-to-fracking-for-shale-gas.html>
- (3) Irish Environmental Protection Authority, November 2012 - Proposed terms of reference for EPA / DECNR/ NIEA Research Programme on Environmental Impacts of Unconventional Gas Exploration & Extraction (UGEE)
http://www.epa.ie/downloads/consultation/UGEEStudy_ProposedTechdESC.pdf
- (4) Financial Times, 'Renewables and gas likely to fuel UK future', 9th December 2012, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/54e96f80-3fa4-11e2-b2ce-00144feabdc0.html>

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