

Hydraulic fracturing is a source of friction among people in New Brunswick. It has even caused violent confrontations.

A TENSE BLOCKADE

On November 14, RCMP officers blocked a section of highway in Kent County, in northeastern New Brunswick. They were responding to another blockade put in place by dozens of First Nations and non-aboriginal demonstrators near the city of Miramichi. The activists were protesting **shale gas** exploration. Company workers had placed equipment along the roadside in preparation for **seismic exploration** and the protesters were upset. They said they had brought their concerns to the

government and the exploration company, SWN Resources Canada, without results.

GUNS, KNIVES AND EXPLOSIVES

RCMP officers were called in to prevent the situation from getting out of hand. It had on October 17th. On that occasion, protesters blocked a compound that stored equipment belonging to SWN Resources.

They had already been asked to stop blocking nearby highways. There was even a **court injunction** in place saying the barricades had to go. But they persisted. When authorities tried to break up the blockade, violence erupted. Five RCMP

cars were burned and 40 people were arrested.

During the October incident, the RCMP seized guns, ammunition, knives and explosives stored inside tents and trucks. It was a tense day.

'RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION'

One of those arrested was Aaron Sock, chief of the Elsipogtog First Nation. Mr. Sock had issued an **eviction** notice to SWN Resources earlier in the month. But the company hadn't left.

After that episode, Mr. Sock requested that the Elsipogtog people proceed with peaceful protests. He asked them to "aim

DEFINITIONS

COURT INJUNCTION: an order to stop doing a given activity

EVICITION: removal from a property by a landlord

FRACKING: the nickname for hydraulic fracturing

HYDRAULIC FRACTURING: the fracturing of rock by pressurized liquids

SEISMIC EXPLORATION: sending artificially created shock waves deep into the Earth to search for fossil fuel deposits

SHALE GAS: natural gas that has been trapped in shale (a layer of compressed clay that breaks easily)



at respectfully communicating the First Nations point of view on our rights.” They agreed that their demonstrations would be peaceful from now on.

The violence may have died down but feelings are still running high. Despite the injunction, protesters have remained and the company has had difficulty carrying on its work. In fact, the Elsipogtog people sought their own injunction to stop SWN Resources, but a judge denied the request. Explorations finally resumed in mid-November.

IN FRACKING'S FAVOUR

What's the appeal of fracking for the province? New Brunswick's economy is weak and shale gas production could be a powerful pipeline to more cash. In what way? Elsewhere, fracking is creating hundreds of thousands of jobs. Jobs generate spending, which boosts the economy.

Supporters also say that fracking could provide North America with clean energy for the next 100 years. That would make the continent less dependent on imported oil for its energy needs. As well, the supply of plentiful, cheap energy is breathing new life into manufacturing.

WHAT'S AT STAKE

However, protesters worry that shale gas development will contaminate drinking water and release methane gas into the atmosphere. It could also put hundreds of dangerous chemicals into the ground. Other criticisms? Fracking requires huge volumes of water – between 3.5 and 30 million litres per job. It has also been linked to earthquakes.

Even some within the energy industry are concerned. Members of Unifor, a union that represents more than 20,000 energy workers, have recommended that all fracking stop until environmental issues are addressed.

“Of course we want to see job creation,” said Unifor's Atlantic director Lana Payne, “but at what cost and at what long term implications for the safety of the people?”

One critic, a Sackville city councillor, feels the province may not be honouring First Nations treaty rights. Liberal opposition leader Brian Gallant also wants shale gas exploration to stop. He says fracking companies should wait until next year, when reports about its safety will be released.

UNPACKING FRACKING

In fracking, a well is drilled below the Earth's **water table**, past the clay layer and into the shale layer. What's in the shale that's so valuable? Pockets of natural gas.

To release the gas, a mixture of sand, water and chemicals is piped into the well at very high pressure. The pressure is too much for the shale, and little cracks begin to form. The sand becomes trapped in the cracks, propping them open and letting the gas seep out. The gas is lighter than water and rock, so it makes its way to the surface. It is then trapped at the head of the well. Presto: natural gas!

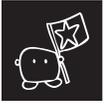
THE GOVERNMENT GOES AHEAD

For his part, New Brunswick Premier David Alward vows exploration will go ahead.

“[The fact that] work continues to take place... [sends] a message that we have full intention to develop that resource,” he said. ★

DEFINITIONS

WATER TABLE: the level at which the groundwater is found. Wells tap into the water table.



WEIGH THE PROS AND CONS

1. Using the information in the article and your own thinking, what are some of the reasons for and against fracking in New Brunswick? Give specific details to back up each point.

Reasons for	Reasons against

2. After completing the organizer, answer the following: *Are you more in favour of or more opposed to fracking in New Brunswick? Give reasons to support your response.*



BETWEEN THE LINES

Making a prediction: What do you suppose might happen to New Brunswick's plan to explore and develop shale gas resources in the province? A plausible prediction *is supported by evidence in the article and is consistent with known facts outside of the article.*

BEYOND THE LINES

What is your understanding of how fracking works? Create a diagram or concept map to show where shale gas is located in the Earth and how it is extracted using fracking techniques.

A good concept map *is complete and clearly shows how the information it contains is related.*

ONLINE

Visit our student website at www.news4youth.com and click on the *What in the World?* tab to:

1. Find out more about the negative consequences of fracking on the Council of Canadians website (or visit <http://canadians.org/water/issues/fracking/index.html>).
2. View animations of hydraulic fracking (or visit <http://www.dangersoffracking.com> and <http://www.gaslandthemovie.com/whats-fracking>).
3. Find out more about the benefits of fracking on Chevron's 'Natural Gas from Shale' page (or visit http://www.chevron.com/deliveringenergy/naturalgas/shalegas/?utm_campaign=Energy_Sources_-_Shale_Gas_English&utm_medium=cpc&utm_source=google&utm_term=fracking).
4. Watch a short video (3:53) on where energy comes from (or visit http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__zB8oSaglk). ★