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“Without rigorous scientific studies, the gas drilling boom sweeping the world will remain an uncontrolled health experiment on an enormous scale.”

Robert E. Oswald, Professor of Molecular Medicine, College of Veterinary Medicine, Cornell University.

Earlier this year, Dr. Oswald and Doctor of Veterinary Medicine Michelle Bamberger, published a peer-reviewed study Impacts of Gas Drilling on Human and Animal Health that examined twenty-four cases in six states. Here are excerpts from an article published in the Cornell Daily Sun on March 14.

- Reproductive problems were most common, but other symptoms in both animals and humans included upper respiratory issues, burning of the eyes, nosebleeds, diarrhea, vomiting, rashes, headaches and neurological problems. Poisoned animals portend danger not only because they may degrade the nation’s food supply but also because they serve as indicators of or, in the paper’s terms, “sentinels” for, human health.

- “What I suspect is that if I follow these cases long enough I am going to start to see reproductive effects in people too,” Bamberger said.

- “A child was sick... some of the animals around that neighborhood were dying... in ways that didn’t really make sense to the veterinarians or to the owners.

- A toxicology test revealed that arsenic poisoning caused the child’s sickness. Since arsenic naturally occurs in shale, the paper said that well water contamination by surface spillage of fracking wastewater was a potential cause for the child’s illness.
The paper compares the oil and gas industry's approach to public health to the tobacco industry’s rejection of a link between smoking and cancer. Its abstract warns that “Without rigorous scientific studies, the gas drilling boom sweeping the world will remain an uncontrolled health experiment on an enormous scale.”

It is difficult to implicate fracking with absolute certainty because in most states there is no law requiring hydrofracturing companies to disclose the proprietary chemicals they use, Oswald said.

Nondisclosure agreements similarly prevent a thorough investigation of all possible data, he said. “That’s where we hit the wall as researchers,” Oswald said, “and where others doing health research will hit the wall too.”

As New York State deliberates over its suspension on fracking, Oswald cautions: “Until they consider the health impacts I think there is absolutely no chance that fracking will be done safely.”

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Read the entire Daily Sun article by Bob Hackett. http://www.cornellsun.com/section/science/content/2012/03/14/prof-fracking-fluid-harmful-animal-health