

Hydraulic Fracturing – Tools for successful engagement with fence-line communities.

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Description of the material

Being frightened of the unknown is a natural and essential human response. The average person in the US has never seen a hydraulic fracturing facility, yet it is a safe assumption that the media has already biased common opinion about the safety and environmental impact of the process. Energy companies must recognize and prepare for this reality when approaching new communities which are deciding on whether or not to allow this industry into their back yards.

Application/development

Dr. Kinslow presents several examples of successful and unsuccessful community engagement strategies as they relate to the energy industry, specifically hydraulic fracturing, in Texas and other states. Through these examples, she illustrates how applying the three tools of commitment, transparency and dedicating the right people for this type of engagement is critical to the economic success of hydraulic fracturing.

Results, observations, and conclusions/ Significance of subject matter

Commitment to the community involves a proactive response to questions and concerns of the community. Interestingly, many concerns from fracking communities do not coincide with those concerns illustrated in the media. Proactively recognizing and addressing these issues learned from past experiences places the industry in a solid position to build a trusting relationship. Transparency is essential in this relationship. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) has developed an outstanding and transparent system of engagement, data-sharing and strong community outreach. This Agency-wide attitude has gained the TCEQ standing as a science-based, strategic, and trust worthy group to turn to when human health impacts are an issue in state and federal regulatory decision making. Having the right people to bring these tools forward is essential for successful engagement. This team must involve a set of communicators that are ready to apply their scientific, business, and regulatory knowledge in order to genuinely help the people. Communities know when someone is not genuine. Having the right people at the front lines to build and maintain that genuine relationship through knowledge sharing will gain respect and trust on all sides.