



WHY FRACKING

Alan R. Rosenfield

alanpeg@alum.mit.edu

Energy Specialist

League of Women Voters of Ohio

2 December 2013

Natural gas has many uses, the largest being fueling electric power plants, with the share of electricity generated using natural gas increasing at the expense of coal over the last fifteen years. Coal and natural gas together provide about 70 percent of the electricity used nationally and about 85 percent in Ohio. As best the problem is understood, natural gas is less harmful to the environment than coal and using more natural gas is a helpful improvement. But it is still a greenhouse gas.

Nuclear energy is the largest non-greenhouse-gas source of electricity, but it has other problems and its use will decrease in the next few years. Hydroelectric power is the next largest non-polluting source but its amount is unlikely to increase significantly. The amount of wind power currently lags, but it is likely to increase strongly in the next decade. Even so, the amount of electricity produced by fossil fuels nationally is unlikely to fall below half of the total in the next 10-15 years.

It can only be concluded that, as a practical matter, the alternative to coal is natural gas.

Better insulation and more efficient furnaces have reduced the demand for natural gas used for heating homes and stores. Natural-gas conservation in a less-direct way has come from a major reduction in use of electricity by industry. Homeowners conserve electricity by using energy-efficient appliances. Even so, conservation can only go so far – it can reduce, but not eliminate, the amount of fracking.

The League of Women Voters addressed the problems of fracking at our 2010 National convention. Consensus was reached. The resulting resolution includes the statement:

“(S)upport and lobby for significant strengthening of appropriate regulation, oversight, inspection, and penalties associated with the development of fossil fuel resources.”

The League of Women Voters of Ohio has based its advocacy in the Ohio General Assembly on this resolution. Among other measures, we have opposed oil and gas production in state parks, supported longer separation of wells from homes and water supplies, and called for full disclosure of fracking chemicals.