

## **What if..? A Fracking Truck Accident We Hope Will Never Happen**

*Athens County, Ohio, February 20, 2013*

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As citizens in 21st century America, we assume that our national and state laws protect us and our children. They do, in many cases, but NOT when it comes to health and safety regulations concerning the fracking of natural gas. In Ohio, there are so many holes in the oil and gas regulations that the loopholes are big enough to drive a bus through.

I wondered what would happen if a truck full of liquid waste (brine) from a horizontally hydrofracked well hit a school bus on one of our rural roads - say Rt 144 in Athens County where a permit for the Atha Injection well is pending. So I started asking questions.

According to Athens County Emergency Management Agency Director Fred Davis, if there were an accident the local volunteer fire department would be the first on the scene. If hazardous chemicals were involved, the responders would call a HAZMAT team. They would have to decontaminate the kids - have them take a shower. They can't take the contamination to a hospital. They would have to clean the ambulance, etc. He said that there should be a placard on the truck that tells what is in it. Each fire department has an emergency response guide that tells how to deal with those substances.

But, for brine trucks carrying fracking fluid from the oil and gas industry there is nothing in or on the truck to tell what they are carrying. That industry is exempt from those laws. How would first responders know what was in the truck?

ODNR's website says, "All registered brine haulers must have the identification number issued by the Division, the word "brine" and the name and telephone number of the hauler on the sides or rear of their trucks... and all brine haulers must maintain a daily log in their trucks."

I asked an Athens County firefighter what they would do. He said they would keep a safe distance while they read the license plate to see who the truck was registered to. The sheriff would call that in to contact the owner to see what was in it.

If it's after hours- then what? Who would they contact and how long would it take? Does the owner of the truck even know all the ingredients—including proprietary and radioactive deep-earth contaminants—that are in his truck and in what quantities?

Meanwhile the kids on the damaged bus are sitting in the cold and breathing in fumes. Those fumes, says Dr. Deb Cowden, an M.D. from Greene County, Ohio, could include benzene, naphthalene, formaldehyde, cadmium, mercury, arsenic, and radioactive radium, barium, and strontium. Each drilling company uses a different proprietary blend, which, they claim, is a trade secret. The doctor can only get the information from the company and is not allowed to share the information. The first responders may not be able to get it at all.

What's *in* the truck is important to how firefighters would handle the situation. The recent testing of waste in connection with the [Mahoning River dumping case<sup>1</sup>](#) revealed "hazardous pollutants including benzene and toluene in samples from the tank and river," according to U.S. Attorney Steven M.

Dettelbach. [The Marietta Times<sup>2</sup> reports](#) “significant concentrations of barium,” a radioactive substance, in frack waste dumped into Rock Run, a tributary of the Little Muskingum.

Dr. Cowden says, “If a fracking truck caught fire, people exposed to it could get holes in their lungs from the fumes. Firefighters would have to fight the fire from upwind because benzene and xylene are toxic and they explode at low temperatures”. The children could have lifelong consequences from the exposure.

Then too, “There may be oil or gas vapors in the wastewater. That wastewater (sometimes called produced water) could cause a flash fire.” So says a [Material Data Handling Sheet<sup>3</sup>](#) for “produced water” (“brine”) published by an Oklahoma company. However, in Ohio, those sheets are not required to be in the truck. A first responder would have to get the number on the truck, and go to the ODNR website to see who it was registered to. Or, if they could get the manifest out of the truck, they would know what company it was from. They would then have to call the company or go to the ODNR website to see if the company was listed there and find the [MSDS<sup>4</sup>](#) sheets. There can often be 40 sheets for each company under the ODNR system.

The Oklahoma MSDS says, “The fire should burn out fairly rapidly depending on the amount of oil and natural gas condensate floating on the surface of the produced water. First responders should promptly isolate the scene by removing persons from the vicinity of the incident if there is a fire.”

However, it would be at least 30 to 40 minutes before emergency personnel could arrive at the scene and even longer to assess the situation. Firefighters are told to wear appropriate protective equipment and self-contained breathing apparatus. But the kids on the hypothetical bus don’t have protective gear. The MSDS sheet tells firefighters to “not extinguish flames at leak because the possibility of an uncontrolled re-ignition exists.”

An accident like this hasn’t happened yet, but it could. This road has 24 school buses a day that travel on it. The proposed injection well can take 1200 barrels (50,400 gallons) of “brine” a day. That means as many as 15 brine trucks could be on this road each day.

This is just one injection well site. There are 207 injection wells in Ohio. Applications are pending for many more. We need to ask our elected officials how our children, our first responders, and our communities can be prepared. Is this industry worth the risk?

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<sup>1</sup> “Lupo charged; 'hazardous pollutants' found in samples,” [Vindy.com](#) 2-14-13

<sup>2</sup> “Guilty Plea in Clean Water Act Case,” [MariettaTimes.com](#) 2-14-13

<sup>3</sup> [devonenergy.com](#) Produced water (sweet) MSDS

<sup>4</sup> <http://oilgas.ohiodnr.com/Industry/Material-Safety-Data-Sheets-MSDS.aspx>