

John Fenton Tour: Background Info.

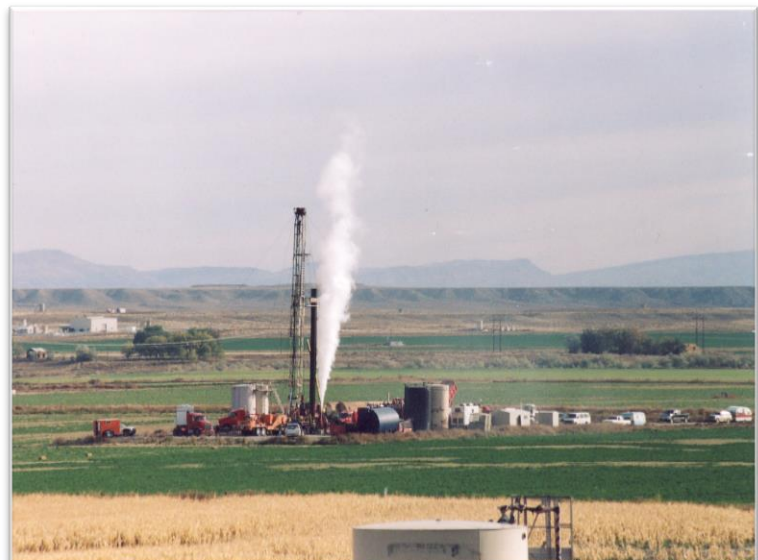
John Fenton is a farmer from Pavillion, Wyoming whose family and community have been seriously impacted by unconventional gas operations in their local area. About 200 tight gas wells have been drilled in the district, with 24 wells located on John's property, one of which is only 100 meters from the family home. John featured in the [Gasland film](#) and toured eastern Australia in early 2014, sharing his experiences of living in a gasfield with packed audiences in cities and regional towns.

John and his family and other Pavillion residents are now living with contamination of their local ground water supplies and air pollution from the surrounding gas operations, with significant impacts on their health and well-being as a result. Local farmers also suffer from gas developments clashing with agriculture, with well pads, access roads, pipelines, truck visits and compressor stations all affecting farm operations.

The gas company working in the area, EnCana, now trucks in drinking water for local farmers even though they refuse to admit liability. Some residents eat from paper plates because they cannot wash dishes without contamination, and they must open their windows when they have a shower. The water flowing out of the bores and taps smells like diesel and can be lit if contained in a jar. Several people in the district have developed neuropathy or other health ailments. Animals in the area have also become sick.

John Fenton has become a leading activist in the US against unconventional gas. He has a great story to tell and is an effective and authentic communicator.

Images of tight gas operations around Pavillion (Images courtesy John Fenton).



John Fenton's Op Ed from Sydney Morning Herald, Feb. 28th 2014:

Coal seam gas industry's solution to underground pollution is to bury the proof

In Wyoming, we have a saying: don't piss on my head and tell me it's raining.

Former Howard government minister [Peter Reith encourages Australians to take a risk](#) with coal seam gas. He justifies the risk by saying: "There is no proven case of fracturing fluid, or hydrocarbons produced by fracturing, diffusing from the fractured zone into an aquifer."

Well, Mr Reith, come smell and drink the water on my farm, because it has been contaminated by fracking. I farm 364 hectares at Pavillion, Wyoming. The gas company Encana has drilled and fracked about 200 unconventional gas wells in our district. When I look out my window, I see gas wells and infrastructure across my land and my neighbour's.

In 2008, we noticed the water from our wells had turned bad. It changed colour and smelt of diesel. We asked the Environmental Protection Agency to investigate. They drilled monitoring bores and, in 2011, released a report that found the shallow and deep aquifers had been contaminated with chemicals linked to fracking and gas extraction.

Benzene was present at 50 times the level that is considered safe for consumption. Phenols - another dangerous carcinogen - acetone toluene, naphthalene, methane and 13 different compounds associated with hydro-fracking were found in the water. Our community was warned not to drink water from our wells and to shower with the windows open, to prevent a build up of explosive gas. My neighbour's water well exploded because of high-pressure gas.

Although the gas company refuses to admit fault, it trucks in drinking water to farmers and has installed reverse osmosis units. Sadly, serious illnesses that can be linked to chemical exposure are affecting many people in our small community. The industry was furious about the EPA report. They knew it was a smoking gun. It meant gas lobbyists, like your Mr Reith, could no longer assert that fracking was safe.

Backed by the state of Wyoming, the gas industry lobbied and donated heavily in Washington. Enormous pressure was put on the EPA and eventually they buckled. Further investigation into our polluted water was turned over to the state of Wyoming. To add insult to injury, the gas company Encana provided funding of \$1.5 million for another study. The EPA has also caved in to pressure and dropped two other investigations into contaminated water at Dimock in Pennsylvania, and Parker County in Texas. EPA investigators resigned in protest.

Australia, this is just the tip of the iceberg. According to a 2003 Schlumberger oilfield review, 5 per cent of well bores fail immediately and, over a 30-year time frame, failure rates exceed 50 per cent.

The pattern in the US is that when water contamination surfaces, the gas company pays an undisclosed sum of money in return for a non-disclosure agreement that prevents people talking about their water contamination. It is the gas industry itself, with its teams of lawyers and deep pockets, that actively prevents investigations into water contamination. That's why industry lobbyists like Mr Reith can say there is no "proven" case of fracking contaminating the water.

When you turn on your tap and the water smells like diesel and explodes with methane, you know the water has been polluted. In Wyoming, the coal seam gas industry has already come and gone as the price of gas crashed. The industry has moved on to fracking shale for oil, leaving 3000 coal seam gas wells abandoned. The taxpayers of Wyoming will now have to foot the bill to cap these gas wells.

I've travelled to Australia to provide a warning from Wyoming about the dangers of fracking. I can tell you as a farmer, and a family man, our community has suffered from poisoned water, polluted air and health issues. The risks of fracked gas are not worth taking. The gas industry will tell you it's a pot of gold, but it has become our pot of poison.