

Chesapeake CEO says there's a solution for every natural gas drilling concern

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Chesapeake Energy chief executive [Aubrey McClendon](#) says that for every environmental concern or drilling inconvenience his industry causes, there is a solution.

Rather than ban natural gas drilling in the U.S., reducing the country's supply of a relatively cheap, clean, domestic fuel, the discussion should be about fixing problems, he said in a speech at the Society of American Business Editors and Writers conference in Dallas on Friday.

"I believe every one of these issues or inconveniences we've had has an engineering solution or a human solution," said McClendon, who leads the most active natural gas driller in the country.

Still, the push-back to drilling from environmental activists and neighborhood groups will cost the industry, he said. As lawmakers halt drilling in some areas or add regulations, there are "financial costs, and it's going to drive smaller companies out of business," he said.

"It is a big boy's game," he said.

During the past couple of years, activists have accused natural gas drillers of contaminating drinking water and polluting the air. Some activists have collected scientific data to show that natural gas drilling causes health and environmental problems, while drilling companies have gathered their own data to counter the accusations.

McClendon said it's impossible for the drilling technique that companies use, called fracking, to contaminate drinking water thousands of feet above. Fracking involves fracturing the sides of a well shaft and injecting water and chemicals to prop open the cracks, allowing natural gas to seep out. But, McClendon said, the industry is only able to create cracks within 200 feet of the well shaft, which in many cases is thousands of feet below drinking water.

So how is it that people can light their faucets on fire? McClendon said that in cases in Pennsylvania where natural gas was found in drinking water, the unique geological formation caused natural gas to shift when a well was drilled. He said that problem can be fixed by engineering the wells differently.

"Be upset if you want to be about truck traffic in rural areas of Pennsylvania," he said. "But do yourselves and your readers a favor to understand that frack water is not coming to the surface in an uncontrolled fashion."

One concern among many people who oppose drilling is that natural gas companies have been secretive about the chemicals they use in frack water. McClendon said a group of companies will announce on Monday a process of voluntarily disclosing such information.

He said domestic drilling has added hundreds of billions of dollars to the national economy, and the techniques the industry developed for gas are being applied to oil. A boom in domestic oil could fundamentally change global politics and allow Americans to distance themselves from problems in the [Middle East](#), he said.

“We will increase oil production in the U.S. by 50 percent in the years ahead,” he predicted.