To the editor

Re: Fracking opponents ridiculed for claiming sand is cancer risk

Your article (20 October 2015) creates the erroneous – and dangerous – impression that fracking operations can use industrial quantities of hazardous chemicals without creating any risk.

Greatly elevated levels of benzene and formaldehyde, both rated group 1 carcinogens, have been measured in US neighbourhoods adjacent to fracking operations. Silica used in fracking in the US has been shown to pose a silicosis and lung cancer risk. When a more stringent occupational silica exposure standard was proposed in the US last year, the fracking industry was one of the most vocal opponents. Not surprising – levels ten times the current standard were discovered during fracking operations. Much of the silica used in US operations is from sources geologically similar to those identified by Cuadrilla. Occupational health fieldwork, not guesswork, is necessary to establish real life exposures in the breathing zones of UK fracking workers.

It would be folly not to learn from the US experience of fracking. The refrain in the UK that, if properly regulated, fracking can be performed with no significant risk to health assumes that the risks have been properly assessed and the regulatory system is robust. Neither is true.

Fracking without question involves exposure to substances linked to cancer, asthma and other health impacts. It is not scaremongering to say so.

Yours faithfully

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