

Facts about fracking

Environmental regulation

What is the Environment Agency's role?

The [Environment Agency](#) is the environmental regulator for onshore oil and gas operations in England. We ensure that oil and gas operations are conducted in a way that protects people and the environment.

Do you regulate the industry with other organisations?

Yes. We are part of a larger regulatory network. We work closely with Public Health England, the Health and Safety Executive, the Oil and Gas Authority and local Mineral Planning Authorities.



Environment
Agency



Oil & Gas
Authority



HSE
Health & Safety
Executive



Public Health
England

Mineral
Planning
Authority

Are the risk in exploring for shale gas too great?

We are confident that the risks can be controlled by good operational practice, reinforced through effective, robust regulation. We are committed to ensuring that people and the environment are protected.



We have conducted a detailed [environmental risk assessment](#) of the potential risk of hydraulic fracturing (fracking) for shale gas and found that the regulations are sufficient to protect people and the environment.

How will you regulate the shale gas industry effectively?

We understand the environmental risks and have the right regulatory controls in place. Our local teams have a thorough knowledge of the local environment. They use their expertise to advise on permit applications and regulate operational sites. They inspect and enforce the permits so that risks are managed. Any non-compliance of the permit, or breach of environmental legislation is taken very seriously.

We regulate a huge number of industrial sites across England, from landfills to nuclear and coal power stations, cement kilns to oil refineries as well as the existing oil and gas industry. We have decades of experience in the assessment of environmental risk and protecting local communities and their environment.



Environment
Agency

How are the regulations in England stronger than in other countries?

We've been working on our regulation of shale gas since 2012. We have undertaken a full assessment of the risks and learnt from experience in other countries.

The regulations and permits in England are strict. There are many things that we will not allow to happen here, such as the storage of waste waters in lagoons or the use of hazardous chemicals in fracking fluids. For more information refer to our 'Environmental Controls in England' factsheet.



We have published [Onshore Oil and Gas Sector Guidance](#) which sets out the regulations and the requirements the industry must meet.

Which environmental permits are required?

As a minimum shale gas companies undertaking fracking will need to obtain a groundwater activity permit, mining waste permit and a radioactive substances permit.

To obtain these permits, companies need to demonstrate that they understand the risks to the environment from their operations and show how they will reduce those risks to as low a level as possible. We will not issue a permit if the activity poses an unacceptable risk to the environment.



Do you inspect sites?

Yes. We undertake announced and unannounced site inspections and audits. Compliance assessment reports are publically available.

We have a 24-hour [incident hotline](#) so that people can report any problems to us directly. We will investigate potential permit breaches or environmental impacts caused by the operation. If we think there is a risk to people or the environment we can use our enforcement powers to shut down an operation.

What happens if environmental damage does occur?

We take environmental damage extremely seriously. If there is an incident which causes pollution of the environment, environmental damage, or if there is a breach of the permit or non-compliance with environmental legislation, we have a [range of enforcement powers available to us](#). Where appropriate, we may also make companies undertake remedial works to rectify environmental damage. Any enforcement action we take will be proportionate to the risks posed to people and the environment and also to the seriousness of the breach of the law.

Our powers include enforcement notices, suspension and revocation of permits, fines and ultimately criminal sanctions, including prosecution.