

## What the Critics Say about 'Gasland'

As "Gasland" producer Josh Fox continues to inject himself into the growing debate over hydraulic fracturing, we thought you might find the following information useful should you address this issue in editorials or columns.

First of all, a distinction must be made between a Hollywood producer/activist and a genuine expert on any issue. Josh Fox is no more an expert on hydraulic fracturing than Steven Spielberg is an expert on extraterrestrial life. The ability to point and shoot a camera does not a technical expert make. If Gasland were to be submitted to the same rigorous peer-review process that scientific papers must go through, there is little doubt that it would be summarily rejected.

The problem with documentaries such as "Gasland" is that their producers don't have to – and often don't – apply sound journalistic practices to their work. Their aim is primarily entertainment, not education, and their focus is too often on sensationalized graphics and unsubstantiated oral testimony, not facts.

That is the major drawback of "Gasland." As pointed out by critics at some of the nation's major newspapers, producer Fox goes heavy on the sensationalism and light on substantiated facts:

- The Washington Post's film critic found that the documentary's sensationalist approach "hints at Fox's failings as an amateur journalist." He described Gasland as "first and foremost a movie, made by a Gen-X smartie." (WP, June 21, 2010)
- The New York Times critic said that Fox "shows a general preference for vivid images ... over the more mundane crossing the t's and dotting the i's of investigative journalism." He criticized Fox's use of anonymous callers making allegations against drillers, wondered why Fox failed to mention state investigations of hydraulic fracturing and added that Fox makes it difficult for objective viewers to embrace him. (NYT, June 21, 2010)
- Another New York Times writer called it "one sided, flawed and personal." (NYT, June 9, 2010)
- The Fort Worth Star-Telegram film critic described it as another "advocacy" documentary and Fox as "an unabashed partisan who uses shock tactics to build his case." He suggested that "you might also doubt a lot of the things that the filmmaker is saying" and adds, "with little in the way of on-screen sources, you have to take much of what he says on faith." (FWST, June 16, 2010)

Film critics, however, aren't the only ones who have found fault with Gasland. In a January 2011 statement, the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, which invested considerable efforts into investigating the film's claims of exploding tap water, said that the three Weld County water wells Fox examined contained naturally occurring gas unrelated to oil and gas activity.

What Josh Fox offers is a superficial Hollywood treatment of an extremely complex issue. The last thing America needs is for public policy decisions to be based on Hollywood fantasies.

We hope you find this information useful. Please feel free to contact me if you would like more information or would like to speak directly with an expert on hydraulic fracturing.