

Topic Page: [Fracking](#)

Definition: **hydraulic fracturing** from *Hawley's Condensed Chemical Dictionary*

A method of enhanced recovery of natural gas and petroleum. An aqueous solution of a water-soluble gum (e.g., guar), in which coarse sand or sintered bauxite is suspended, is introduced through a well bore under extremely high pressure into the rock structure in which the gas or oil is entrained. This creates minute fissures (fractures) in the rock, which are held open by the suspended particles after the liquid has drained off. The hydrocarbon flows through these fissures to the well bore and is evacuated to a pipeline. The sand and bauxite are called “proppants” by petroleum engineers as they prevent the fissures from closing. Sand is used in shallower wells and bauxite in formations over 10,000 ft deep.

See chemical flooding.

Summary Article: **fracking**

From *Dictionary of Energy*

The use of “frack” as a shortened form of *fracture* originated in the 1950s. At that time it applied to medical or physical contexts but not specifically to the use of fracturing to extract oil and gas. This practice goes back almost to the beginnings of the U.S. oil industry, when explosives such as nitroglycerin were used to create fractures. The current method of using fluids and sand began experimentally in the 1930s, was first patented in 1949, and became widespread soon after. However, the volume of materials used was miniscule compared to today’s large-scale operations; e.g., 750 gallons of water as opposed to modern methods using an average of 5 million gallons per well. *Fracking* was a commonly used industry term for many years, but was not widely known to the general public until the recent boom in the use of this technology. This boom was met by a wave of protests over the environmental threats posed by fracking. Because “frack” is a short, negative-sounding word, it lent itself much more to use in these protests than the more technically correct term *hydraulic fracturing*. This has been intensified by the fact that *frack* calls to mind a universally known four-letter word, causing protesters to use slogans such as “Get the Frack Out of Here.” As a result the industry now actively discourages the use of *frack*. For example, the official glossary of oilfield services giant Schlumberger currently has nine different entries for “frac” terms (*frac fluid*, *frac pump*, etc.) but omits *frack* entirely.

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Morris, C. (2014). fracking. In C. Cleveland, & C. Morris (Eds.), *Dictionary of energy* (2nd ed.). Oxford, UK:

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