

# Obama's EPA Shuts Down Damning Fracking Study

by STEVE HORN, Counterpunch 1/17/13

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The Associated Press has a [breaking investigative story out today](#) revealing that the Obama Administration's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) censored a smoking gun scientific report in March 2012 that it had contracted out to a scientist who conducted field data on 32 water samples in Weatherford, TX.

That report, [according to the AP](#), would have explicitly linked methane migration to [hydraulic fracturing \("fracking"\)](#) in Weatherford, a city with 25,000+ citizens located in the heart of the [Barnett Shale](#) geologic formation 30 minutes from Dallas.

It was authored by [Geoffrey Thyne](#), a geologist formerly on the faculty of the Colorado School of Mines and University of Wyoming before departing from the latter for a job in the private sector working for Interrallogic Inc. in Ft Collins, CO.

This isn't the first time Thyne's scientific research has been shoved aside, either. [Thyne wrote two landmark studies](#) on groundwater contamination in Garfield County, CO, the first showing that it existed, the second confirming that the contamination was directly linked to fracking in the area.

It's the second study that got him in trouble.

"Thyne says he was told to cease his research by higher-ups. He didn't," [The Checks and Balances Project explained](#). "And when it came to renew his contract, Thyne was cut loose."

## From Smoking Gun to Censorship: Range Resources Link

The Obama EPA's Weatherford, TX study was long-in-the-making, with its origins actually dating back to a case of water contamination in 2010. The victim: Steve Lipsky.

"At first, the Environmental Protection Agency believed the situation was so serious that it issued a rare emergency order in late 2010 that said at least two homeowners were in immediate danger from a well saturated with flammable methane," [the AP wrote](#).

[AP proceeded to explain](#) that Lipsky had "reported his family's drinking water had begun 'bubbling' like champagne" and that his "well...contains so much methane that the...water [is] pouring out of a garden hose [that] can be ignited."

The driller in this case was a corporation notorious for intimidating local communities and governmental officials at all levels of governance: [Range Resources](#). Range, in this case, set up shop for shale gas production in a "wooded area about a mile from Lipsky's home," [according to the AP](#).

As *DeSmogBlog* revealed in November 2011, [Range Resources utilizes psychological warfare techniques](#) as part of its overarching public relations strategy.

Due to the grave health concerns associated with the presence of methane and benzene in drinking water, the Obama EPA "ordered Range...to take steps to clean their water wells and provide affected homeowners with safe water," [wrote the AP](#).

[Range's response](#)? It "threatened not to cooperate" with the Obama EPA's study on fracking's link to water contamination. The non-cooperation led to the Obama EPA suing Range Resources.

It was during this phase of the struggle where things got interesting. As the [AP explained](#),

Believing the case was headed for a lengthy legal battle, the Obama EPA asked an independent scientist named Geoffrey Thyne to analyze water samples taken from 32 water wells. In the report obtained by the AP, Thyne concluded from chemical

testing that the gas in the drinking water could have originated from Range Resources' nearby drilling operation.

Despite this smoking gun, everything was soon shut down, with the Obama EPA reversing its emergency order, terminating the court battle and censoring Thyne's report. The [AP explained](#) that the Obama EPA has "refused to answer questions about the decision."

"I just can't believe that an agency that knows the truth about something like that, or has evidence like this, wouldn't use it," Lipsky, who now pays \$1,000 a month to have water hauled to his family's house, [told the AP](#).

### **"Duke Study" Co-Author Confirms Veracity of Thyne's Study**

[Robert Jackson](#), a Professor of Global Environmental Change at Duke University and co-author of the ["Duke Study" linking fracking to groundwater contamination](#) did an independent peer review of Thyne's censored findings. He found that it is probable that the methane in Lipsky's well water likely ended up there thanks to the fracking process.

Range predictably dismissed Thyne and Jackson as "[anti-industry](#)."

### **Americans Against Fracking: An "Unconscionable" Decision**

[Americans Against Fracking](#) summed up the situation best in a scathing press release:

It is unconscionable that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which is tasked with safeguarding our nation's vital natural resources, would fold under pressure to the oil and gas industry... It is again abundantly clear that the deep pocketed oil and gas industry will stop at nothing to protect its own interests, even when mounting scientific evidence shows that drilling and fracking pose a direct threat to vital drinking water supplies.

There's also a tragic human side to this tale.

"This has been total hell," [Lipsky told the AP](#). "It's been taking a huge toll on my family and on our life."