



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Environmentalists achieve a ban on fracking in New York, United States - 2012-2014

26-MAR

2012

to: 17-DEC

2014

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: *New York state*

Location Description: *All across NY*

Goals:

Induce ban on hydrofracturing for natural gas or 'fracking' in the state of New York, United States.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 004. Signed public statements
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 021. Delivering symbolic objects
- 036. Performances of plays and music
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 178. Guerrilla theatre
- Other... › Die-in
- Other... › Online and International media
- Other... › Producing a film/video
- Other... › Social Media Campaign

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications

- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 161. Nonviolent harassment
- Other... › Online and International media
- Other... › Social Media Campaign

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 161. Nonviolent harassment
- Other... › Online and International media
- Other... › Social Media Campaign

Methods in 4th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 161. Nonviolent harassment
- Other... › Online and International media
- Other... › Social Media Campaign

Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 161. Nonviolent harassment
- Other... › Online and International media
- Other... › Social Media Campaign

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 161. Nonviolent harassment

- Other... › Online and International media
- Other... › Social Media Campaign

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Environment

Group characterization:

- Environmentalists

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Eric Weltman (Food and Water Watch), Claire Sandburg (Water Defense), Wes Gillingham (Catskill Mountainkeeper), and David Braun (United for Action) are key early leaders creating New Yorkers Against Fracking (NYAF) a coalition of 250 groups by the end of the campaign. Sandra Steingrabber is a key leader and spokesperson.

Partners:

Food and Water Watch, Water Defense, Catskill Mountainkeeper, and United for Action, and more than 150 other groups including a diverse collection of consumer advocacy, health, religious, food, artists, and environmental organizations and dozens of grassroots groups.

External allies:

Sierra Club, National Resources Defense Council (NRDC), and Environmental Advocates of New York, Earth Justice, Americans Against Fracking, Frack Free Nation, Greenpeace, 350.org, Environment America, National Wildlife Federation, and Erin Brockovich (consumer advocate) among many others.

Involvement of social elites:

Mark Ruffalo (actor), Yoko Ono and Sean Lennon (musicians) 2/13, Melissa Leo (actor), Natalie Merchant (musician), Joan Osborne (musician), Tracy Bonham (musician), Debra Winger (actor) and many others in Artists Against Fracking.

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Artists Against Fracking

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 5 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Independent Oil and Gas Association (trade group for energy industry), energy companies, some landowners who wanted to lease their land for fracking.

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known.

Campaigner violence:

None.

Repressive Violence:

None.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Complete success on their goal.

Hydraulic fracturing or “fracking” injects a mixture of water, sand and chemicals under high pressure into dense shale rock formations to crack the rock and release oil and/or natural gas. Oil companies began using the process around 1950, but only in the mid 2000’s did it become a widespread environmental issue as energy companies began developing new ways to find oil and gas as the cheaper, easier sources were depleting. One geologic formation, called the Marcellus Shale, included about 1/3 of southern New York state, including the Catskill mountains and the New York City watershed, which supplied fresh water to New York City in the United States of America. The energy companies wanted to drill thousands of holes for extracting primarily natural gas, or methane, across the area.

They promoted the new projects by predicting an economic boom for an area with a weak and struggling economy. Energy companies in Pennsylvania had already begun fracking on the other side of the southern border of New York with much controversy over its overall costs and benefits. The supporters said it would bring jobs and revenue to the area and the state. The opponents said it generated an unacceptable health risk from air pollution and water pollution. US law allowed the energy companies to refuse to release information about the chemicals pumped into the ground by identifying them as proprietary information. However, testing in fracked areas revealed many chemicals known to be

cancer causing. Use of the chemicals risked contaminating the groundwater without a known way to clean it up. Supporters said it could be done safely with the proper regulations. Opponents replied that the environmental agencies, like Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection had insufficient staff to monitor and properly regulate the thousands of wells being drilled, and that, over decades, the wells would leak and potentially contaminate the water supply. In New York, Governor David Patterson, declared a moratorium in 2008 to give time for the state government health department to study the issue and make a recommendation to the governor. Andrew Cuomo became governor in 2008, and successfully ran for reelection in 2012. The anti-fracking campaign targeted Governor Cuomo during much of this campaign.

In March of 2012, anti-fracking groups came together to form a coalition, New Yorkers Against Fracking (NYAF), to coordinate action in hopes of having fracking banned in New York. By 2014, well over 150 groups had become involved. They came together partly to join their resources so that they could do things individual groups couldn't do alone, including advertising campaigns and videos. One of their most visible activists, actor Mark Ruffalo, aired their first video on national TV when he was a guest on the Colbert Report, a popular comedy show that parodied news broadcasters.

The coalition created a social media site on <http://facebook.com> [1] on 23 March 2012, to promote their events, document their activities and spread the word about the dangers of fracking and opportunities to help. They also created a website around the same time to host blogs and press releases, publicize events, educate about the issues, and recruit new supporters.

NYAF members held public meetings and rallied at legislators' offices around the state, including State Senator Jack Martins' office where they presented a petition on 23 April 2012 with 2,600 signatures urging him to support a current bill to ban fracking. They also presented a letter with over 70 small businesses, religious organizations, and leaders signing on asking him to co-sponsor the bill. The next day, he did co-sponsor a bill for a moratorium on fracking, but not a ban.

Activists wrote many letters to the editor in various newspapers throughout the campaign about the dangers of fracking and urged a ban in New York state. One of the leaders, Eric Weltman of Food and Water Watch, wrote to the New York Daily News on 29 April 2012.

The campaign made it clear that many New Yorkers opposed fracking. They delivered petitions to officials and sent comments to hearings about fracking. On 2 May 2012, they delivered 200,000 signatures asking for a ban on fracking to Governor Cuomo's office in the state capitol, Albany. Meanwhile, the opposition, the energy industry lobby group, the Independent Oil and Gas Association (IOGA), ran its own effort to

influence public opinion by sending postcards attacking the celebrity supporters of a ban as lacking credibility because they were not scientists. IOGA further asserted that scientists and engineers didn't believe fracking was harmful and that people should trust their expertise. This lobbying group arranged private meetings with legislators and the Governor's staff on 2 May 2012 rather than holding public events.

NYAF organized a multi-media concert and rally on 16 May 2012, with Mark Ruffalo and Melissa Leo hosting and Natalie Merchant, Joan Osborne, Tracy Bonham, and many others performing. On 15 May 2012, an external ally, the national group Frack Free Nation, conducted a series of events. They presented the Governor with a basket of food produced in New York that they claimed would be adversely affected by fracking, including apples, cheese, wine and maple syrup. They also held a die-in protest that led to the arrest of two protesters for disorderly conduct as they sprawled on the floor in front of the doors to the Executive Chamber.

The local groups within NYAF held many rallies and protests aimed at influencing the legislators who would be involved in the decision around allowing fracking or not. At the district office of the Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos on 7 June 2012, 70 people held signs and banners and chanted slogans urging the senator to ban fracking in the state.

Whether fracking could be done safely constituted one of the central controversies. Josh Fox, who made the Academy Award nominated documentary, *Gasland*, and its sequel *Gasland 2*, produced a short 18 minute film to support the anti-fracking campaign in New York. Released late in June 2012, it challenged the idea that fracking could be done safely.

The campaign involved many artists, including celebrities who used their ability to get media attention to publicize their opposition to fracking and educate the public about the dangers. They formed a group, Artists Against Fracking, in August of 2012 to organize themselves and create a collective identity for their activity to ban fracking. Yoko Ono and her son Sean Lennon Ono organized the group with 150 members in August of 2012, growing to 200 by 2014. Ono and her son appeared on late night TV, 'Late Night with Jimmy Fallon', on 13 July 2012.

Sometimes the campaign used costumes to attract media coverage and make their point. On 15 August 2012, NYAF protesters held signs and banners at the Yogurt Summit, where industry experts, New York dairy farmers and government officials had come together to brainstorm how to increase milk production in New York and support the growing yogurt industry in New York. The area being considered for fracking included many dairy farms and a large greek yogurt company, and some protesters dressed up in cow costumes to draw attention to the threat that contaminated

drinking water would pose to the dairy industry.

On 27 August 2012, several thousand people held a rally outside the governor's office in Albany and delivered letters containing pledges by more than 300 people to take nonviolent direct action if he allowed fracking in New York state. Yoko Ono and Sean Lennon Ono presented 204,000 public comments opposing fracking on 11 January 2013 in response to proposed draft regulations released by the Department of Environmental Conservation. That same day, activists held a rally with 1,500 or so people opposing fracking, and many of them took a pledge together to conduct civil disobedience to stop fracking. They chose this time to hold the rally because the moratorium on fracking was scheduled to expire soon in February of 2013.

Governor Cuomo's administration was reported to be planning to promote a plan to limit fracking to 5 'Southern Tier' counties only in communities that support it. NYAF resisted the Governor's attempt to get a compromise. In early February 2013, the campaign decided to start a 'twitter storm' (social media campaign) along with thousands of phone calls to send two messages, 'Don't frack NY' and 'Not one well'.

On 12 February 2013, the Cuomo administration decided to delay their decision about fracking and to complete a comprehensive study of the health effects of fracking, to ensure they would not risk the public health. Their focus on public health effects led to NYAF's decision to start a new social media campaign called 'Another Fracking Problem' on 25 February 2013, to highlight what was wrong with fracking as part of their public education program.

NYAF continued its efforts through the spring and summer of 2013 to broaden the support base, continue public education, and increase pressure on the governor. On 19 April 2013, Yoko Ono opened an art show called 'Imagine No Fracking' and invited allies and members of Artists Against Fracking to call or tweet (send a twitter message) to urge the governor to ban fracking. On 17 June 2013, NYAF organized a rally and 'March to stop fracking and say yes to renewable energy' with over 130 organizations and 2000 people participating. On 26 July 2013, NYAF started a "Frack Facts" social media campaign to spread the information about the science and data that show the dangers of fracking.

In the fall of 2013, the anti-fracking activists began to increase their use of celebrity allies and attracting national attention. During the last week in August, activists in Buffalo, Syracuse, Binghamton, and Scranton rallied to send a message to President Obama as he travelled through their communities that they didn't want fracking. In November of 2013, Marisa Tomei, Darren Criss, Lance Bass, Daryl Hannah, Amy Smart, Hayden Panettiere and Wilmer Valderrama appeared in a series of celebrity videos NYAF released that challenged President Obama, Governor Brown of California, and Governor Cuomo of New York to ban fracking for

health and climate change reasons.

Similar actions were conducted throughout 2014. Activists held regular rallies and wrote letters to the editors, protested at any public appearance of the Governor, and continued to hold public meetings for educating local communities. The campaign leaders made a decision to 'bird dog' Governor Cuomo, to confront him with protesters demanding a ban on fracking at any public appearance he made. This continued for the entire campaign through the end of 2014. They chose this strategy rather than trying to win incremental legislative progress, which they felt would lead to unacceptable compromises. Their slogan was 'Not one well'. They wouldn't agree to fracking in only certain counties where the community approved it. They focused on the health risks in their messaging to the public, rather than mentioning many different reasons they opposed fracking. They wanted a clear focus that people could remember and to which they could relate.

The Health Department released its findings at a year-end cabinet meeting in Albany. The acting state health commissioner, Dr. Howard A. Zucker, presented the findings and said there was insufficient evidence that fracking could be done safely. This analysis led the administration to ban fracking in New York, thus meeting the goal of the campaign.

Research Notes

Influences:

Not known.

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Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Jamie Irwin, 07/03/2015

A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.

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Links:

[1] <http://facebook.com>