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Pollution in China, therefore Fracking. Wait... what?

By: Paula Graham | July 20, 2015
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N.L. fracking review panelist Maurice Dusseault gave a funny — and awkward — speech at Memorial University recently.

LETTERS

[Maurice Dusseault](#) gave us a laugh (and induced a lot of wincing) a few weeks ago as he peddled misinformation about fracking as a guest speaker for MUN's Student Society for Petroleum Engineers.

It was a bit awkward because Dusseault preached about the engineering code of ethics and being "global citizens" when it comes to meeting the world's energy needs, but at the same time lauded fracking, a pollution-heavy form of oil and gas extraction that contributes to climate change, and by extension exacerbates human diseases, increased catastrophic weather events, food insecurity, and social inequality.

Another layer of awkwardness is Dusseault's position on the N.L. fracking review panel — you know, the 'independent' panel that is deciding whether to allow fracking in the province.

Among other absurd arguments, Dusseault tried to convince us that since people in China are having health problems as a result of burning coal, we should be making ourselves more dependent on oil and gas, specifically fracking. This is akin to arguing that if people in Toronto are dying from heroin overdoses, we should build more meth labs in Vancouver. Dusseault essentially claimed that fossil fuel pollution in one part of the planet will be solved by burning more fossil fuels in other parts of the planet. Wait... what?

The host of the event, Chevron Chair in Petroleum Engineering Dr. Lesley James, issued a strong warning at the beginning of Dusseault's talk: this is not political, this is technical [!]. And before she took questions she again reminded the audience that only questions of a technical nature would be addressed. However, this was sharply contradicted by Dusseault's own blatant political commentary. At the beginning of the presentation he literally invited the crowd to laugh at Quebec's aim to become a fully sustainable-energy province.

Dusseault's first slide overtly mocked the idea of "Life without Fossil Fuels," and implied that people who wish to transition away from fossil fuels are irrational hippies. Silly tree-huggers want a world that *doesn't* involve being held hostage by a rogue industry that has put us on a path of ecological catastrophe? Hilarious!

Dusseault also argued that methane is "not toxic, just unpleasant," when addressing the controversial issue of fracking and water contamination. Methane is naturally occurring, after all.

In all his moral engineering glory, Dusseault rushed through or simply skipped slides in his presentation that discussed the risks of fracking and dismissed documented cases of water contamination near well sites.

Don't worry, he insisted, the oil and gas industry is "obsessed with safety." The only thing stopping us from drilling the perfect oil well is lax regulations and our aversion to risk. Wait... what?


In his very technical and 'not at all political' presentation, he also quipped that eating bitumen (aka tar, or asphalt) would be a silly way to try to commit suicide because it is also not toxic, just unpleasant. Good to know, I guess.

Leaving himself more time to make sure we thought *really hard* about how fracking would help reduce pollution in China, Dusseault left climate change and global ecological sustainability out of his presentation completely.

- [Q&A with fracking review panel member Maurice Dusseault](#)
- [NL fracking panel and the messiah complex](#)
- [Snowflakes and the avalanche: promoting fracking in Newfoundland](#)

Perhaps the most confusing was the 20 or so minutes Dusseault spent talking about how rocks shift, under the ground, naturally. This is what 'hydraulic fracturing' apparently refers to scientifically: movements causing fractures in rocks.

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Ok, sure. But I'm assuming that this sermon was supposed to convince people, by way of rhetorical confusion, that when we talk about hydraulic fracturing *as an industrial practice* it's no different than the shifting of rocks that has been happening throughout the history of planet Earth. Does Dusseault think that people are too stupid to know the difference between "rocks move on their own sometimes" and "we pump deadly chemicals into the ground to shift the rocks to extract oil"?

Main take-away from Dusseault's presentation: Advances in fossil fuel technology will fix the problems and pollution of the fossil fuel industry.

In other words: Pollution in China, therefore fracking.

Also, the Student Society for Petroleum Engineers serves pizza at their events.

Paula Graham / St. John's

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