

Fracking row scientist lied about his credentials

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/environment/article4163950.ece>

Times 1st Aug 2014

A retired scientist who argues that fracking is dangerous and gives evidence against drilling applications has been accused of making a false claim about his qualifications. The Geological Society has written to [David Smythe](#) to demand that he stop claiming that he is a chartered geologist.

The University of Glasgow, where Mr Smythe worked 16 years ago, has also written to him asking him not to suggest that its academics share his views.

Mr Smythe, who uses the title “Emeritus Professor of Geophysics, University of Glasgow”, last week helped to persuade west Sussex county council to reject an application to drill an exploratory shale well. He described Celtique Energie’s application as “incomplete, incompetent, and disingenuous” and said the high number of faults in England’s shale rock meant fracking could contaminate ground water.

He is also advising Frack Free Fernhurst, a group opposing fracking in the South Downs national park, and has given evidence on behalf of campaigners against a coal bed methane project in Falkirk. Anti-fracking campaigners describe him as “a world-class star of geological research” in a statement based on his claims.

However, Paul Younger, professor of energy engineering at the University of Glasgow, said that Mr Smythe, who played bass guitar in the punk rock band the Rezillos in the 1970s before becoming an academic, **was not qualified to give expert evidence on fracking.**

Professor Younger said: **“He has published nothing on [shale gas] in any proper scientific forum — no doubt because he knows he would never get past peer review with his pseudo- scientific scaremongering.**

“He falsely claims to be a chartered geologist — that’s fraudulent. It’s wilful untruth.

“I am concerned about the damage to the reputation of the university by someone who never fails to use his university affiliation.”

Professor David Manning, president of the Geological Society, wrote last month to Mr Smythe telling him not to use the title “chartered geologist”.

The governing body of the University of Glasgow wrote to him saying: “Notwithstanding our support for freedom of expression, we respectfully request that you make it clear in all of your future publications and broadcast media appearances that the views which you hold and express are your own and are not necessarily representative of the views held by the university’s researchers.”

Mr Smythe admitted that he should not have claimed to be a chartered geologist but said that it was a “trivial matter” because he had been one once but had stopped paying his subscription in 1996.

A spokeswoman for the Geological Society said that the title required proof of “continuous professional development”, not just payment of a subscription.

Mr Smythe, who lives in the south of France, said that he had done extensive research into unconventional energy extraction. He said: “In my severance agreement [with the University of Glasgow], I have the perpetual right to call myself emeritus professor.”

He said he had never suggested that his views were shared by the university. He said that Professor Younger had a vested interest in unconventional sources of fossil fuel as [a director of the coal gas company Five-Quarter Energy.](#)

He said: “A lot of British academics have in effect been bought off by the oil industry. They depend on grants from that industry so they dare not speak out critically.”

“I write reports [on fracking] for public inquiries to a very high standard because my aim is that I’m providing all the evidence if any such inquiry decision were to go to judicial review.”

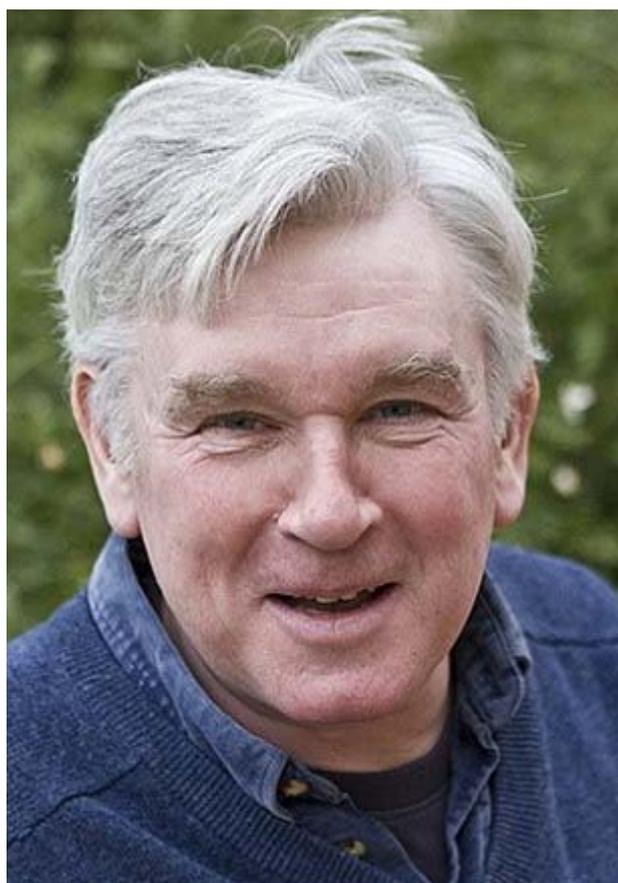
Professor Younger said that he had no links with any fracking company.

Anti-fracking 'expert' and question marks over his credentials: Ex punk rocker 'lied and peddled pseudo science'

- David Smythe accused of being less than totally honest over his credentials as shale gas expert
- Retired geologist has been prominent in highlighting dangers of fracking
- Professor at his old university accuses him of 'pseudo-scientific scaremongering'
- Geological Society demands he stops claiming to be chartered geologist
- Mr Smythe insists he has done extensive research into unconventional energy extraction

By [Michael Seamark](#)

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Retired scientist David Smythe, pictured, has been accused of being less than totally honest about his credentials as a shale gas expert

Anti-fracking campaigners describe him as 'a world-class star of geological research', but David Smythe was accused today of being less than totally honest about his credentials as a shale gas expert.

The retired geologist and former punk rock guitarist has been prominent in highlighting the dangers of fracking and last week helped to persuade a county council to reject an application to drill an exploratory shale well.

But a professor at his old university now accuses him of 'pseudo-scientific scaremongering'.

The Geological Society has also written to Mr Smythe – who has the title 'Emeritus Professor of Geophysics, University of Glasgow' – demanding that he stops claiming to be a chartered geologist.

Glasgow University, where he last worked in 1998, has told him he must not suggest that its academics share his views.

And Prof Paul Younger, Glasgow's professor of energy engineering, said Mr Smythe – who played bass guitar in the 70s punk band The Rezillos – was unqualified to give expert evidence on fracking, having retired 16 years ago.

'He has published nothing on (shale gas) in any proper scientific forum – no doubt because he knows he would never get past peer review with his pseudo-scientific scaremongering.'

But Mr Smythe, 67, who now lives in the South of France, hit back saying he could find no publications on fracking by Professor Younger, adding: 'So you could say he is no more an expert than me.'

In recent months Mr Smythe – who was head of Geophysics at Glasgow from 1988 until the department was closed in 1998 – has warned of the potentially serious environmental damage that fracking poses, including a huge risk of water contamination.

Last week he helped to persuade West Sussex County Council to reject an application by Celtique Energie to explore for shale oil, describing its application as 'incomplete, incompetent and disingenuous.'

[Friends of the Earth say we need a presumption against fracking](#)



He has also given evidence on behalf of campaigners against a subterranean methane project involving drilling 22 bore holes 800 metres deep into the Falkirk countryside.

Mr Smythe suggested the process of removing the gas could result in earthquakes becoming more likely in the area and potential contamination of streams and rivers, posing a threat to human health.

In a recent newspaper interview Professor Younger said: 'He falsely claims to be a chartered geologist. That's fraudulent. It's wilful untruth.'

'I am concerned about the damage to the reputation of the university by someone who never fails to use his university affiliation.'

Professor David Manning, president of the Geological Society, wrote last month to Mr Smythe telling him not to use the title 'chartered geologist.'

The governing body of Glasgow University also wrote to him saying : 'Notwithstanding our support for

freedom of expression, we respectfully request that you make it clear in all of your future publications and broadcast media appearances that the views which you hold and express are your own and are not necessarily representative of the views held by the university's researchers.'



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David Smythe has given evidence on behalf of anti-fracking campaigns and claims to have done extensive research into unconventional energy extraction

Mr Smythe, who believes he may be an illegitimate descendant of Prince Albert, admitted that he should not have claimed to be a chartered geologist but said that it was a 'completely trivial matter' because he had been one once but had stopped paying his subscription in 1996.

But a spokeswoman for the Geological Society said that the title required proof of 'continuous professional development', not just payment of a subscription.

Mr Smythe, who lives in the Languedoc and rents out a self-catering apartment in his mansion overlooking the Canal du Midi, insists he had done extensive research into unconventional energy extraction.

He said Professor Younger sent him a 'very abusive email' after he appeared on a recent radio programme in Scotland 'accusing me of arm-waving and talking nonsense.'

Mr Smythe, whose 1970s punk band had its biggest success with a cover version of the Fleetwood Mac song 'Somebody's Gonna Get Their Head Kicked In Tonight' added: 'You could say it is sour grapes.'

The University of Glasgow confirmed Mr Smythe has right to use the title 'emeritus professor' and the retired scientist said he had never suggested that his views were shared by the university.

'A lot of British academics have in effect been bought off by the oil industry. They depend on grants from that industry so they dare not speak out critically,' he said.

'I write reports [on fracking] for public inquiries to a very high standard because my aim is that I'm providing all

the evidence if any such inquiry decision were to go to judicial review.'

Mr Smythe is advising Frack Free Fernhurst, a group opposing fracking in the South Downs national park.

Martyn Knights, one of the campaigners from the group, said: 'None of this stops him from doing his job, he is still a geologist.

'As regards the university, he has always said that it is his own opinion that he states.

'I am not a geologist but as far as I am concerned, what he has said so far makes common sense.'



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Scientist who gave evidence against fracking site accused of claiming false qualifications

Dr David Smythe has been told by the Geological Society to stop using their title, but says his accusers have vested interests



Dr Smythe has given evidence on behalf of various anti-fracking campaigns Photo: CHRISTOPHER PLEDGER

By Laurence Dodds

9:57AM BST 01 Aug 2014

A retired scientist who campaigns against fracking and gives evidence on drilling applications has been told he must stop claiming he is a chartered geologist.

Dr David Smythe, a former professor at the University of Glasgow, helped persuade West Sussex council last week to reject an application for exploratory shale drilling.

But the former punk bassist has been told by the Geological Society that he cannot use the title “chartered geologist” after he stopped paying his subscription in 1996.

Meanwhile, his old employer has written to him asking him to “make it clear” that his views are not those of the university or its researchers.

Prof Paul Younger, professor of energy engineering at the University of Glasgow, told the Times: “He has published nothing on [shale gas] in any proper scientific forum — no doubt because he

knows he would never get past peer review with his pseudo- scientific scaremongering.



“He falsely claims to be a chartered geologist. That’s fraudulent. It’s wilful untruth.”

“I am concerned about the damage to the reputation of the university by someone who never fails to use his university affiliation.”

Dr Smythe has given evidence on behalf of various anti-fracking campaigns, including the south downs-based Frack Free Fenhurst group and activists against a coal bed methane project in Falkirk.

He described Celtique Energie’s application to drill a test borehole at Northrup Copse near Widsborough Green as “incomplete, incompetent, and disingenuous”, claiming ground water could be contaminated if fracking was approved.

In a letter, the governing body of the University of Glasgow said: “The governing body of the University of Glasgow wrote to him saying: “Notwithstanding our support for freedom of expression, we respectfully request that you make it clear in all of your future publications and broadcast media appearances that the views which you hold and express are your own and are not necessarily representative of the views held by the university’s researchers.”

But while he admitted he should not have claimed the ‘chartered geologist’ title, Dr Smythe said it was a “trivial matter” because he had formerly been one before ending his subscription to the Society in 1996.

He claimed that his severance agreement with the University gave him the “perpetual right” to call himself emeritus professor and that he had never suggested it shared his views.

He also pointed out that Prof Younger is a director of the Newcastle-based coal gas drilling company Five-Quarter Energy, and therefore had a vested interest in unconventional sources of fossil fuels. The company says its ‘deep gas winning’ technology – which involves injecting oxygen and steam into undersea deposits – is distinct from, and safer than, fracking.

Dr Smyth said: “A lot of British academics have in effect been bought off by the oil industry. They depend on grants from that industry so they dare not speak out critically.”

“I write reports [on fracking] for public inquiries to a very high standard because my aim is that I’m providing all the evidence if any such inquiry decision were to go to judicial review.”

The Geological Society maintains that chartered  geologists must show “continuous professional development” beyond merely paying their fees.

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