Don't Drink the Water

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By DAVID MANTEY, Editor, *Product Design & Development* (PDD [1])

A stunt by any other name would reek as foul. Recently, one of the few companies to remain living, however infamously, despite continuous bouts with bad press, made a splash in the news when a demonstration from the company's CEO became a trite example of the company's ignorance and arrogance.

During a keynote speech at a Colorado Oil and Gas Association conference, Halliburton CEO Dave Lesar addressed public concerns regarding hydraulic fracturing. Fracking, as the process is often called, is a process that extracts natural gas by blasting an undisclosed blend of chemicals, water and sand underground. Some of the confusion and anger commonly associated with fracking surrounds the non-disclosure regarding the fracking fluid's chemical makeup, which has included some of the same elements used for antifreeze and hair bleach.

Many fear these chemicals can leach into the groundwater and contaminate drinking supplies. Maintaining a competitive edge is fine when it comes to streaking brunette hair with silver and pink stripes, but it seems secondary when you need to call into question the safety of drinking water.

To answer the many questions surrounding the potential poisoning of the one source that remains second to only the sun in terms of human survival, Lesar stood before his peers at the conference and raised a glass to safer fracking fluid. The glass contained a new fracking fluid, CleanStim, made with ingredients commonly found in the food industry. CleanStim is currently undergoing field trials and is meant to address the clean water concerns resulting from the fracking process.

As is the customary climax to every toast, the CleanStim swill was swallowed. However, the CEO called in a fellow executive to send it down the hatch. According to an article by the Associated Press, the pinch hitter feigned reluctance and then took a swig of Stim. Had the glass held a new synthetic vodka and the CEO was an alcoholic working towards a 10-year chip, I would understand the hand-off. By passing the taste test onto an underling, the demonstration became a stunt and any potential credibility was shrouded in unnecessary doubt.

To add a bit of conspiratorial juice to the story, Halliburton didn't release the executive's name or health status following his gulp as of press time. My suspicion

is that the buck-passing will be attributed to a health condition once the initial buzz dies down. Who knows? Maybe the stunt was an elaborate ploy to get “#CleanStim” and #ediblefracking” trending on Twitter.

The rare PR win for Halliburton quickly became another setback when the king had his right-hand man taste his beverage before he quenched his thirst.

Bottom-up empowerment requires top-down accountability. Forget the implications for the company, Lesar stood atop a closely watched industry and failed to lead in a moment of great significance.

The secrecy makes you wonder if the unnamed executive raced to the ER holding a black bag full of money — maybe he held out for a new car for the wife and tuition for the kids before he committed to the charade.

What’s your take? Please let me know by emailing david.mantey@advantagemedia.com *[2].*

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