Blog Round-up
March 19, 2010

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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With the internet, blogs, Twitter, forums - people are talking about EPA 24/7
Here's a sampling of what was said on March 18, 2010:

NOTE: To read the entire blog entry, click on underlined URL. To learn more about the blogger, click on the name/link in first line. Notes and headings are from OPA.

MTR Protests

our post on @LisaPJackson's reaction to our #MTR protest asking her to #gotoAppalachia!
Posted by: joshkahnrussell: 8:10 pm Full post: http://tinyurl.com/yky2n2q

@LisaPJackson's reaction to activist lockdown by @RAN on EPA lawn.
Posted by: RAN: 8:05 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/a0xfzM
(Rainforest Action Network)

Lisa Jackson's Reaction To Mountaintop Removal Activist Lock Down At EPA – It's Getting Hot In
Posted by: MillMsgr 8:00 pm Full post: http://url4.eu/1rGXc
(Note: From Blog: "Take Action:
1. Facebook Action: Comment on the Lisa Jackson's Facebook page, and ask her to "Please go to Appalachia and see for yourself, it's time to end MTR!" Facebook.com/lisapjackson
2. Twitter Action: Follow and Retweet @RAN's tweets about MTR, including:
Dear @LisaPJackson, Over 470 American mountains are gone forever. How many more will it take for @EPAgov to ban #MTR #coal? #GoToAppalachia!
The Appalachian Mountains are being being blown to bits. To protest, tweet @LisaPJackson")

Lisa Jackson's Reaction To Mountaintop Removal Activist Lock Down At EPA
Posted by: RisingTideNA 6:10 pm Full Post: http://bit.ly/diMHiN
(Note: by Rainforest Action Network)

Please join today's EPA #mtr protest action: Tweet @lisapjackson : #GoToAppalachia!
Posted by: @thecitizen 5:43 pm

EPA to Study Hydraulic Fracturing

NEWS10: Stakeholders discuss future of gas drilling: More than a hundred people turned up at the Regency Hotel in ...
Posted by: binghamtonnews: 7:00 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/dyWBkj

Denver Business Journal: EPA to study impact of hydraulic fracturing - an area of faculty research and interest for mountain communities
Posted by: ColoradoSPH: 6:45 pm Full post: http://tinyurl.com/yhek3f5
(Note: Colorado School of Public Health)

EPA to Focus Impacts from on Hydraulic Fracturing in Marcellus and other Shales...
Posted by: rsenvironmental: 6:32 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/cqjlad

EPA to renew study of gas drilling impacts: Hydraulic fracturing has helped fuel an energy development boom, but h...
Posted by: GreenVisionIPV 6:05 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/bhcMGX

NYT: EPA Begins Study of Fracturing's Effects on Water Supplies
Posted by: Freshpurewater: 6:30 pm Full post: http://tinyurl.com/ylrdadm

The Hill: EPA launches study of controversial drilling method
Posted by: http://thehill.com/blogs 2:30 pm Full post: http://thehill.com/blogs/e2-wire/677-e2-wire/87649-epa-launches-study-of-controversial-gas-drilling-method
("Our research will be designed to answer questions about the potential impact of hydraulic fracturing on human health and the environment," said Dr. Paul T. Anastas, A.A. for ORD, in a prepared statement.)

GHG Regulation and Climate Change

News9.com AG says EPA finding could hurt economy
Posted by: oklahomanews: 6:50 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/9ilUVl
(Oklahoma Attorney General Drew Edmondson says an Environmental Protection Agency finding could cripple economic development in the state.)

Flea and Tick Products Announcement (Con't)

EPA issues warning on pet flea and tick products
Posted by: @the_daily_green 7:23 pm Full post: http://su.pr/2AQOYK

EPA Flea & Tick Safety Announcement Improves Labels, But Are the Products Safe?
Posted by: JadeGemAqua: 7:21 pm Full post: http://shar.es/mWDFs

Due to a significant increase in adverse incidents, the EPA is taking a series of actions to increase the safety of...
Posted by: TheCVMA 7:19 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/a3pICI

(Note: California Veterinary Medical Association – on Facebook)

ROUND-UP OF MAJOR BLOGS

WATER

EPA To Do A New Study On Natural Gas ‘Fracking’ (Huffington Post)

CAIN BURDEAU | 03/18/10 06:27 PM

NEW ORLEANS — The Environmental Protection Agency said Thursday that it will study potential human health and water quality threats from an oil and natural gas drilling technique that injects massive amounts of water, sand and chemicals underground.

Hydraulic fracturing, also known as "fracking," has gained widespread use to unlock huge natural gas reserves, but the technique also has raised concerns about environmental damage.

EPA said the $1.9 million study, expected to be completed by 2012, will look at the effect on groundwater, surface water, human health and the environment in general.

Hydraulic fracturing injects millions of gallons of fluids under high pressure into a well drilled into rock formations to enlarge cracks and release oil or gas. Sand is pumped into the fractures to keep them from closing.

Recently fracking has been used to tap natural gas stored in shale formations; most notably the Barnett Shale in west Texas, the Haynesville Shale in north Louisiana, the Fayetteville Shale in northern Arkansas, Woodford Shale in southern Oklahoma and the Marcellus Shale beneath New York, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Ohio.

According to the Energy Information Administration, there are 1,744 trillion cubic feet of technically recoverable natural gas in the U.S., or enough to supply the country for 90 years at current rates of production. Much of it can only be recovered with fracking wells, according to the industry.

Concern is mounting that unregulated fracking will taint drinking water, siphon off too much surface material, deplete aquifers and produce briny wastewater that can kill fish.

A 2004 EPA study found no evidence that fracking threatens drinking water, but critics argued that the report was flawed and last year Congress asked EPA for a new study.

U.S. Rep. Maurice Hinchey, D-N.Y., has pushed Congress to regulate the practice. He said the 2004 EPA study was "marred by biased data influenced by senior officials" in the Bush administration. A spokesman said he was referring to former Vice President Dick Cheney.

A provision in the 2005 energy bill prevented EPA from regulating fracking. Houston-based oilfield giant Halliburton Co. pioneered the technique. The 2005 provision was called the "Halliburton loophole" by foes.

"You take 7 million gallons of water (per well) out of an aquifer in a little area, you're not going to get recovery for who knows how long," said Jimmy Couvillion, a landowner in Keithville, La. He wants more oversight of drillers scrambling to tap the Haynesville field.

Wilma Subra, a Louisiana chemist and environmentalist who's investigated shale field exploration nationwide, said leaks and spills were a threat and drillers should divulge what chemicals they're using. They're not required to do that now.

Arthur E. Berman, a Houston-based petroleum geologist who's questioned the headlong rush to open up shale fields on economic grounds, said the environmental risks have been overblown.

"We have been doing hydraulic fracturing for 50, 60 years and there is no evidence whatsoever that there has been ground or surface water contamination," he said.

He said only "point-5 percent" of what goes into a well were chemicals, and those were mostly "common chemicals that you would put in your swimming pool or hot tub, something like chlorine."

"Having said that, the companies should come clean and reveal the content (of the chemicals they use)," he said. "We're dealing with people's fears, and that's justified."

He said water conservation was a bigger issue because wells require as much as 10 million gallons of water.

Drillers said leaks are rare because a well is covered in a steel casing capped at both ends with cement.

"Fracturing has a long and clear record of safely leveraging otherwise unreachable homegrown, clean-burning, job-creating energy reserves," said Lee Fuller, the head of Energy In Depth, a Washington-based coalition of natural gas and oil producers.

In response to environmental concerns, Fuller said the industry has been drawing up standards for well casings and how to best handle the fluids in wells. He said efforts in Congress to regulate fracking should be halted until the EPA study was completed.

EPA Launches National Study of Hydraulic Fracturing (Grist)

by Abrahm Lustgarten, ProPublica - March 18, 2010 3:38 pm EDT

Responding to reports of environmental contamination [1] in gas drilling areas across the country, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will conduct a nationwide scientific study [2] to determine if the problems are caused by the practice of injecting chemicals and water underground [3] to fracture the gas-bearing rock.

The study, announced Thursday but hinted at for months, will revisit research the agency published in 2004 [4], which concluded that the process of hydraulic fracturing [5] did not pose a threat to drinking water. The 2004 report has been widely criticized, in part because the agency didn't conduct any water tests in reaching that conclusion.

"The use of hydraulic fracturing has significantly increased well beyond the scope of the 2004 study," EPA spokeswoman Enesta Jones wrote in response to questions from ProPublica. The old study, she said, did not address drilling in shale, which is common today. It also didn't take into account the relatively new practice of drilling and hydraulically fracturing horizontally for up to a mile underground, which requires about five times more chemical-laden fluids than vertical drilling. "This study is the agency's response to public concern about this practice and Congressional request."

The 2004 report was used by the Bush administration and Congress to justify legislation exempting hydraulic fracturing from oversight under the Safe Drinking Water Act. The exemption came to be known in some quarters as the "Halliburton loophole" and has inhibited federal regulators ever since.

The fracturing technology, in which a mixture of chemicals and water is injected underground with sand at high pressure to crack the earth and release natural gas, made it possible for energy companies to open vast domestic energy reserves across the country and fueled a nationwide boom in drilling activity.

"EPA needs to finish what is started," said Gwen Lachelt, director of the Oil and Gas Accountability Project, a Colorado-based advocacy group that represents landowners with contaminated water. "We need comprehensive studies of the entire exploration and production process, but this is an important place to start."

The American Petroleum Institute released a statement saying it expects the study "to confirm what 60 years of experience and investigation have already demonstrated: that hydraulic fracturing is a safe and well understood technology for producing oil and natural gas."

Lee Fuller, vice president of government affairs for the Independent Petroleum Association of America, said hydraulic fracturing is one of the industry's "crowning achievements."

"Adding another study to the impressive list of those that have already been conducted [6] and completed is a welcome exercise," he said.

A series of investigations by ProPublica [4] found that fracturing is the common thread in more than 1,000 cases of water contamination across seven states [1]. In some cases fracturing may have caused dozens of well failures where [7] the concrete or steel meant to protect aquifers from the gas and drilling fluids cracked under high pressure, allowing contaminants to seep into the water. In hundreds of other cases the waste and chemicals generated by hydraulic fracturing have been spilled or seeped into surface and groundwater supplies.

Fuller said that Congress' efforts to allow the EPA to regulate [8] the process "should come to a standstill until this study is completed."

More than 50 members of the House of Representatives have co-sponsored the Frack Act [9], a bill that would reverse the drilling industry's exemption from the Safe Drinking Water Act and allow the EPA to regulate fracturing if it chose to do so. The Frack Act also would require companies to disclose the chemicals pumped underground in the process -- information that is usually protected as trade secrets. The House Energy and Commerce Committee is also conducting a separate investigation [10] of hydraulic fracturing's impact on water resources.

The EPA has yet to say exactly how the new study will be conducted or when it will begin, but sources within the agency told ProPublica that it will likely involve a number of EPA regional offices in Colorado, Texas, New York, Pennsylvania and elsewhere, and could build off two related investigations [11] the EPA is undertaking in Wyoming gas fields.

In its announcement [2] Thursday, the agency said it will spend nearly $2 million on the research this year and is asking for more money for next year. It promised a transparent, peer-reviewed process that includes stakeholder input. The EPA is seeking input from its Science Advisory Board on exactly how the study should proceed.

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