

# Environmentalists call for probe of diesel use in fracking fluid

**Jim McGill, Platts News Service, 8-6-10**

A coalition of environmental organizations is calling on Congress and the US Environmental Protection Agency to investigate the alleged use by two oil field services companies of diesel fuel in their hydraulic fracturing fluids, in apparent violation of federal law.

The coalition on Thursday sent letters asking the EPA and the House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee to determine whether Halliburton and BJ Services violated the federal Safe Drinking Water Act, which restricts the use of diesel in fracturing operations.

In addition, the coalition sent letters to the two service companies as well as French services company Schlumberger, demanding to know "where and when they injected diesel and related compounds."

In February, Committee Chairman Henry Waxman said the two companies had used diesel fuel as an additive to fracking fluid between 2005 and 2007.

The environmental groups allege that "industry documents obtained by the committee reveal that Halliburton and B.J. Services had used diesel in hydraulic fracturing operations in at least 15 states in 2005, 2006 and 2007."

The environmental groups asked the committee "to investigate exactly where and when the companies injected diesel so that communities can protect themselves."

The Energy Policy Act of 2005 specifically exempted the practice of fracking from regulation under the SDWA. However, an exception was made for diesel, which because it contains the BTEX complex of chemicals, remains regulated under SDWA.

BTEX refers to benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylene, substances that are toxic in water at very low levels.

When the issue was raised in February, Waxman cited a letter BJ Services wrote to the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform -- which he chaired at the time -- acknowledging that the company's actions were "in violation" of a 2003 voluntary memorandum of agreement with the EPA.

A Halliburton spokeswoman declined to answer specific questions that Platts posed concerning the allegations, but referred Platts to a press release the company issued in February in response to Waxman's charges.

That statement said in part, "the company's use of diesel-based fluids since signing the MOA has been in compliance with that agreement. The terms of the MOA specifically cover coalbed methane gas development activities."

Halliburton contends that the MOA does not cover fracking operations "in other unconventional gas development activities or conventional formations."

Spokesmen from Schlumberger and BJ Services did not respond to inquiries seeking comment.

Dusty Horwitt, a spokesman for the Environmental Working Group, said that more than 25 organizations from all over the US took part in the letter-writing campaign.

"We'd like to see the companies disclose to the committee when and where they injected diesel" when involved in fracking, he said. "In 2005, when Congress generally exempted fracking from the Safe Drinking Water Act, Congress did not exempt diesel. The underground injection of diesel fuel remains subject to the permitting requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act."

Horwitt said the BTEX chemicals in diesel could "get into groundwater or surface water" in several ways: by traveling through the fractures created as part of the fracking process itself, by following natural underground pathways, or through spills of wastewater produced in the drilling process.

Lee Fuller, executive director of the industry advocacy group Energy InDepth, called the letter campaign, "another example of where the environmentalists are looking for ways to undermine ability to use natural gas in the US."

Fuller said that, in the past, the well service industry had used diesel as a solvent in fracking fluid, but the industry has since abandoned the use of the material. "Even when diesel was being used there were no demonstrated incidents of diesel in groundwater," he said.

The environmental groups hope to pressure the EPA to require that the service companies perform unnecessary studies in search of a non-existent problem "to cost them time and money," Fuller said.