

# EPA seeks comment in Denver on fracking study

Catherine Tsai, Associated Press, 7-14-10

DENVER — Natural gas industry groups on Tuesday urged the Environmental Protection Agency to limit the scope of an upcoming study on the effects of a natural gas extraction process known as fracking.

Some environmental groups want the federal agency to also examine eventual effects on air quality. The EPA held the second of four public meetings to gather comments about its upcoming study on how drinking water might be affected by a method of extracting natural gas.

The process — called hydraulic fracturing, or fracking — pumps water and chemicals underground at high pressure to help extract trapped oil and natural gas. The fluids help open fractures in shale formations, allowing natural gas to flow from the breaks into a well.

Fracking has been around for decades, but amid a natural gas drilling boom, members of Congress have questioned whether it could taint drinking water or harm human health. Critics said a 2004 EPA study that found no evidence of threats to drinking water was flawed.

The EPA doesn't regulate fracking, leaving that process to states. U.S. Reps. Diana DeGette and Jared Polis, both Colorado Democrats, are among those pushing for federal oversight.

Besides potential effects on drinking water, critics have raised concerns including whether fracking, which can use millions of gallons of water, could deplete aquifers.

America's Natural Gas Alliance, an advocacy group for the gas industry, submitted comments last week that, in part, supported focusing the study on effects on drinking water. It also sought input on the makeup of EPA study and advisory panels.

"History demonstrates that hydraulic fracturing can generate abundant, secure energy supplies, without adverse consequences to drinking water," alliance President and CEO Regina Hopper said in a letter to the EPA.

Las Animas County resident Tracy Dahl, though, suspects that his southern Colorado well, which has produced clean, clear drinking water for the last seven years, was muddied by fracking at an adjacent property June 30.

"That evening, we checked the cistern and there was 500 gallons of murky, nasty water where it had always been clean before," Dahl said before the meeting. "Seems to me to be a pretty direct correlation. Whether we can prove it or not is another matter."

He said he is now driving 80 miles roundtrip to Trinidad to get drinking water.

"I saw this coming years ago. I was petitioning every politician I could think of to try to come up with stronger regulations to prevent this. Then to have to just see it happen anyway, it's fantastically frustrating," said Dahl, a 51-year-old technical specialist in renewable energy.

Colorado Oil and Gas Conversation Commission Director Dave Neslin said most of Colorado's 42,000 active oil and gas wells rely on fracking and that the commission has investigated hundreds of groundwater complaints over the years but found no verified instance of fracking harming groundwater.

The EPA held its first public meetings on the study last week in Fort Worth, Texas. Other meetings are scheduled July 22 in Canonsburg, Pa., and Aug. 12 in Binghamton, N.Y.