

# Fracking is normal and safe, BLM, oil and gas reps say

Chris Casey, Colorado Springs Gazette, 4-26-11

GOLDEN, Colo. -- Hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling techniques are used in 90 percent of wells in the United States, and precautions are in place to ensure that groundwater is unharmed by growing production, speakers at a federal forum said Monday.

The forum, which included speakers from the Bureau of Land Management, state regulators and the oil and gas industry, drew about 300 to the Denver West Marriott in Golden. It was the third in a series of BLM-hosted hearings nationwide about fracturing, or fracking, and energy production on public lands.

The BLM is contemplating new federal regulations, though the Environmental Protection Agency has found no evidence of water-quality degradation from fracking, said Dave Cesark of Mesa Energy. The EPA is conducting another study into fracking to be completed next year.

Dave Neslin, director of the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, which regulates the industry on private lands, said Colorado ranks fifth in the nation for gas production and 10th in oil.

He said most of Colorado's 44,000 active wells rely on fracking to create permeability in the rock and open pathways for oil and gas to reach the surface.

"This technology is absolutely vital to unlocking Colorado's rich oil and gas reserves," he said.

Speakers detailed the many layers of governmental precautions required in the drilling of fracking wells. Chief among them are the cement casing that creates a hydraulic seal within the space between the well bore wall and the resource pipe and verifying the integrity of those seals.

Rich Ward, a geologist with the Aspen Science Center, said there are seven layers of steel piping and cement that isolate the well from contact with subsurfaces, including water tables.

"Well integrity is the absolute key in this whole process," he said.

That said, he noted it's possible for a casing to be flawed but that if proper pressure checks are done, any such flaws can be quickly repaired.

One in 10 wells drilled in Colorado is on BLM lands, mainly on the Western Slope.

Neslin said the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission's regulations are similar to the BLM's.

He said the COGCC has investigated hundreds of complaints about contamination related to fracking "and to date we've not found any instances of groundwater contamination."

He said the agency is going beyond regulations with participation in a new website - [www.fracfocus.org](http://www.fracfocus.org) - where oil and gas producers voluntarily report the chemicals used in fracking. Thirty-five operators have so far registered to participate, including large operators such as Halliburton.

Cesark said, in general, 99.5 percent of fracking materials are sand and water. The other 0.5 percent of materials

used, he said, are chemicals commonly found in households, such as acids, antibacterial agents, corrosion inhibitors, lubricants and gels.

He said there is typically a mile to two miles of separation between an aquifer and shale formations where fracking takes place. Between those layers is impermeable rock.

"The risk of fracking fluid coming in contact with an aquifer is extremely remote and there really are a great many precautions that take place to prevent it," Cesark said.

Cathy Purves, of Trout Unlimited, said wastewater management needs stricter oversight and that the public should be fully involved.

Michelle Haefele, an economist with The Wilderness Society, said regulatory agencies in charge of monitoring fracking are understaffed and need more resources. She said the BLM should pursue rules for full public disclosure of chemicals used in fracking, noting a recent federal study that found some carcinogens in fluids.

"If these fluids are so safe, then the industry shouldn't have a problem disclosing them to us," Haefele said.