

Oversight panel to probe regulations that slow drilling

Mike Soraghan, Environment & Energy Publishing, 5-3-11

The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee is going on the road to Bakersfield, Calif., on Friday to look at regulations hampering oil and gas drilling.

The field hearing will fall on the last day of the comment period for an oil company's controversial proposal to lease public land in a nearby county.

The full committee will be joined by House Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.), who represents Bakersfield. McCarthy helped plan the hearing, titled "Can New And Safe Oil Extraction Technologies Help Address Gas Prices?"

The hearing will be the 11th in a series allowing businesses the chance to point out federal regulations they find burdensome. U.S. EPA's environmental regulation has come under repeated criticism as part of the effort by Chairman Darrel Issa (R-Calif.). The committee said the hearing will focus on lowering energy and fuel costs, in addition to job creation.

"The committee will examine new technologies as well as the regulatory and policy impediments to full development of domestic resources," said a committee announcement.

The pending oil project is not in McCarthy's district but nearby in the Hames Valley of Monterey County. The Bureau of Land Management will take comments through Friday on a proposal to lease 2,605 acres in the area for oil production.

The potential drilling has drawn local opposition from residents, who are particularly concerned about the technique known as hydraulic fracturing. The original title of the hearing when it was announced was "Pathways to Energy Independence: Hydraulic Fracturing and Other New Technologies."

It is not clear why fracturing would have been referred to as "new technologies," since its supporters in industry frequently emphasize that fracturing has been around for about 60 years.

Efforts to regulate hydraulic fracturing under federal safe drinking water laws were a high priority in the list of burdensome rules sent to Issa earlier this year from the Independent Petroleum Association of America.

In fracturing, sand and chemical-laced water is injected underground at extremely high pressure to crack open rock and release oil or gas. Critics worry it could contaminate drinking water, but industry says it is perfectly safe.