

Science board pushes EPA to change major fracking report

Devin Henry, The Hill, 8-11-16

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) scientific review board is criticizing a major agency study into fracking, saying officials need to offer more evidence backing up their claims.

The SAB concluded the fracking study was "comprehensive but lacking in several critical areas." It said the EPA needs to clarify its findings and present more evidence backing them up because "the statement has been interpreted by readers and members of the public in many different ways."

The [letter](#) — from Peter Thorne, the chairman of the Science Advisory Board, and David Dzombak, the chairman of the board's Hydraulic Fracturing Research Advisory Panel — comes more than a year after the EPA published a 1,000-page draft study into the impacts of fracking on the national drinking water supply.

The report, [released last June](#), concluded fracking has not caused major harm to drinking water. The study — the product of five years of research — was treated as a major victory for the oil and gas industry, which said it validated their claims about fracking's safety.

Environmentalists, meanwhile, criticized the findings. In a Thursday statement, Food and Water Watch senior researcher Hugh MacMillan said the EPA should heed the Science Advisory Board's recommendations and "be clear about fracking's impacts on drinking water resources."

Industry-backed groups, meanwhile, noted that the SAB didn't ask the EPA to change the conclusions of its report, but rather to back them further in a final version.

"The panel does not ask EPA to modify or eliminate its topline finding of 'no widespread, systemic impacts' to groundwater from fracking – it asks EPA to provide more details or a 'quantitative analysis' of how the agency came to that conclusion," the Independent Petroleum Association of America wrote Thursday in an [analysis](#) of the study.

Thirty SAB experts pored over the EPA's fracking study and released a 180-page assessment of it Thursday. Twenty-six of the board's members said the study's major conclusion needs more clarification and explanation.

The SAB said the EPA should also consider the impact fracking has on local water systems and conduct more case study research to back up its findings.

"The SAB is concerned that these major findings as presented within the [report's] Executive Summary are ambiguous and appear inconsistent with the observations, data, and levels of uncertainty presented and discussed in the body of the draft Assessment Report," the SAB wrote.

In a statement, the EPA said it plans to finalize the fracking report this year.

"EPA will use the SAB's final comments and suggestions, along with relevant literature published since the release of the draft assessment, and public comments received by the agency, to revise and finalize the assessment," the agency said in a statement.

Four members of the Science Advisory Board dissented from the recommendations, saying the EPA's initial conclusion is "clear, unambiguous, concise, and does not need to be changed or modified."