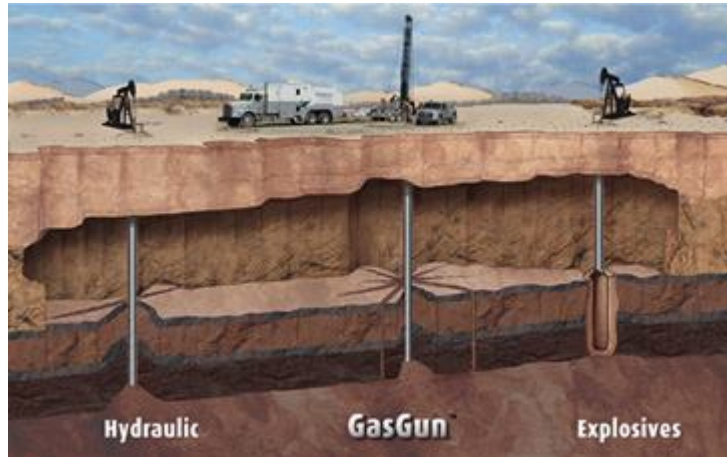


# EPA Investigates Fracking

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As the drilling technique hydraulic fracturing or 'fracking' becomes more common, the US House Energy and Commerce Committee is examining the impact it may pose to human health by tainting drinking water and harming the environment. According to a 19 February 2010 announcement, the US



Environmental Protection Agency and Congress will begin working together to study the issue. The committee is seeking information from eight major energy companies and five smaller companies that use hydraulic fracturing to extract oil and natural gas from unconventional sources, including shale rock.

The fracking process - which injects water, sand and chemicals into rock formations at high pressure to force out oil and natural gas - has long been used to stimulate production in old wells, but is now also used to tap oil and gas trapped in shale beds across North America.

At issue is not only the potential for contaminating ground water sources, but the amount of water used to create the slurry used in fracking. According to Matt Simmons, CEO of Simmons & Co International, in three and a half years time the industry has damaged 70 billion barrels of potable water in the process of fracking the 10,000 wellbores in the Fort Worth Basin. 'Energy's water use has been traditionally been free, and soon this wasteful practice has to stop,' Simmons was quoted as saying in January at the Energy Risk Symposium held in Houston (OE February 2010).

Rep. Henry Waxman, D-California, the panel's chairman, said hydraulic fracturing could help unlock vast supplies of domestic natural gas once thought unattainable, but he added that lawmakers need to weigh the risks. Waxman sent a letter to energy and fracking companies involved in the study, requesting documents with data identifying the number and location of wells fracked in the US in 2008 and 2009. The letter seeks information on the proximity of the wells in relation to underground sources of drinking water as defined by the Safe Drinking Water Act as well as the identity and total volume of products and chemicals used in fracking US natural gas wells.

Residents in gas-drilling areas have complained about discolored or foul-smelling well water and that children became sick after drinking the water. Oil & gas companies call the criticisms unfounded, saying gas drilling is done thousands of feet below ground, much deeper than most water resources are located.

Energy In Depth, an interest group backed by independent oil and gas operators, said it welcomed the Congressional probe. Executive director Lee Fuller touted the industry's safety practices. 'To the extent the committee's inquiry into this process helps clear up some of the misconceptions that have come to be associated with it, it's a study we look forward to contributing to,' Fuller said.