

Markey mum on natural gas ‘fracking’ legislation

By Ben Geman
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Rep. Ed Markey (D-Mass.) on Tuesday declined to say if he will push to bring a controversial natural gas drilling method under federal environmental regulation, noting that his inquiry with Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) has just begun.

“We are just at the beginning of the process right now, so we are not reaching conclusions, we are initiating an inquiry,” he told reporters.

The pair this month [sent letters to eight companies](#) that use a practice called hydraulic fracturing, a method increasingly being employed to access abundant U.S. supplies of natural gas from shale formations.

Markey – who chairs the Energy and Environment Subcommittee – and Waxman asked the companies for information about chemicals they use and potential health and environmental harms.

A big 2005 energy bill exempted the practice from Safe Drinking Water Act regulation, and natural gas producers are lobbying vigorously to keep the exemption intact during the Democrats’ reign. “We are going to gather the facts about what is going on and then make decisions consistent with the evidence,” Markey said when asked about seeking to overturn the exemption.

The drilling practice – dubbed “fracking” – involves high-pressure injections of chemicals, water and sand to break apart rock formations. Environmentalists fear that fracking will contaminate water supplies. The industry contends it is safe, and that overlaying new federal requirements on state-level rules would be costly and discourage gas production.