



EARTHWORKS

Statement of Bruce Baizel, Senior Staff Attorney, Earthworks' Oil and Gas Accountability Project on the Department of Interior's New Rules Regulating Hydraulic Fracturing on Public Lands

May 4, 2012 - Durango, CO “Today the Obama Administration and Secretary Salazar proposed new rules to protect the quality of our air, water, and public health from the harmful impacts of natural gas development, underscoring the need for federal standards as a floor.”

The new rules will apply to hydraulic fracturing, otherwise known as “fracking”, operations on public lands. The Department first issued rules for fracking on public lands in 1982, but they have not been updated since 1988. Since then, technological advances in horizontal drilling have led to both increase the spread of natural gas development and public concern about its safety with regard to air and drinking water resources. These rules create consistent minimum requirements for chemical disclosure, wellbore integrity, and waste disposal, among other aspects of the process.

Baizel continued, “National public lands need national standards. As the largest manager of oil and gas resources in the United States, the BLM can—and should—be a model for all oil and gas operations. The BLM has an opportunity to join with the more responsible states in moving toward a future where the oil and gas production industry develops these resources in ways that reduce threats to public health and the environment and that respect the quality of life in local communities.”

Baizel continued, “Improved regulation of hydraulic fracturing can reduce the risks presented by oil and gas development to clean air, clean water, wildlife habitat, and communities. Some in industry have moved to increasingly use such practices as full chemical disclosure, notice to landowners, green completions, wastewater recycling, closed-loop waste management systems, and the like, and have found that many of these approaches are economical to adopt.”

Baizel continued, “The Department has proposed some common sense requirements related to mechanical integrity testing and reporting before, during, and after fracking begins. Minimizing the potential for water contamination depends upon proper casing and wellbore integrity.”

Baizel continued, “But, we need a final rule that encourages reuse or recycling of the produced waters. Allowing operators to simply dump toxics in to pits is unacceptable. We also have real concerns that disclosure only occurs after fracturing begins. This precludes the opportunity for baseline water testing to determine whether contamination has occurred.”

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