

March 6, 2011

Mr. Edward Hanlon
Designated Federal Officer
SAB Staff Office
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Mailcode 1400R
Washington, DC 20460

Re: Copy of Oral Statement on the Draft Hydraulic Fracturing Study Plan to be Undertaken by the Environmental Protection Agency

Dear Mr. Hanlon:

Please find below a copy of the oral statement I will be presenting on behalf of the Natural Resources Defense Council at the March 7th-8th, 2011 Public Meeting for SAB's Review of EPA's Hydraulic Fracturing Study Plan

“Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments on behalf of the Natural Resources Defense Council. NRDC strongly commends EPA for undertaking this study to understand the risks to drinking water posed by hydraulic fracturing. The number of incidences of drinking water contamination in which hydraulic fracturing is a known or suspected cause continue to grow, and as such the importance of this study cannot be understated. Such incidences have been linked to all stages of the hydraulic fracturing water lifecycle and therefore NRDC fully supports EPA’s decision to examine the risks from each stage, both separately and cumulatively.

Conclusively linking hydraulic fracturing to drinking water contamination has been difficult at best either due to a lack of investigation or because regulators and the public have lacked the necessary data or technology to do so. There are many examples where families have reported water contamination after nearby oil or gas wells were hydraulically fractured. In many of these cases, rigorous explanations of the causes of water contamination have not been established and the potential link to hydraulic fracturing has not been sufficiently investigated.

Due to the fact that this study will focus specifically on drinking water resources, EPA has deemed several proposed topics of research to be outside the scope of this study. We believe, however, that several of these excluded topics do fall within the bounds this study, specifically:

1. Seismic and related risks
2. Impacts to aquatic and terrestrial species
3. Equal focus on all types of oil and gas development where hydraulic fracturing is being used, not only shale gas

It is also crucial for EPA to examine the cumulative impacts on drinking water from each stage of hydraulic fracturing and over the lifetime of an oil and gas development project.

NRDC encourages EPA to also investigate best management practices and best available technology for each stage of the hydraulic fracturing lifecycle and identify any gaps between those and standard or typical industry practice.

NRDC requests that EPA reverse its decision to exclude re-fracturing or fracturing of old wellbores from this study. Wellbore integrity inevitably degrades over time and older wells may have been constructed using less protective standards and therefore these practices represent an important category of risks to drinking water.

We recognize that in order to carry out the proposed case studies it will be important for EPA to coordinate with various stakeholders. However, we request that, to the extent possible, EPA also perform unannounced site visits and inspections. This is crucial to ensure that EPA will visit locations that are representative of typical operations and not just those which are being performed under the highest standards due to the knowledge that EPA will be visiting.

While recognizing that this study is focused specifically on drinking water contamination, we continue to encourage EPA to fully examine the potential risks that oil and gas production utilizing hydraulic fracturing poses to air, land, wildlife, public health, and community character.

NRDC is very supportive of EPA's proposed hydraulic fracturing study plan. This research is crucial to developing scientific understanding of the impacts and risks to drinking water from the full hydraulic fracturing lifecycle. EPA must take all precautions to ensure that the study is unbiased, peer reviewed by impartial third parties, based on the best available science, and free of political pressure from any special interest.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. NRDC is pleased that EPA is undertaking this study in recognition of the serious environmental and public health concerns associated with oil and gas production utilizing hydraulic fracturing.”

Sincerely,

Briana Mordick
Science Fellow
Natural Resources Defense Council