



National 'fracking' fluid database unveiled

By JEREMY FUGLEBERG

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CASPER, Wyo. — A national database for the ingredients used in a controversial technique for obtaining oil and gas was opened for use on Monday.

The database, located at www.fracfocus.org, is a place for companies to voluntarily list the contents of the fluid used in hydraulic fracturing.

The site is a cooperative effort by the Ground Water Protection Council and the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission and is partially funded by the U.S. Department of Energy.

“Our organizations have a responsibility to keep the public informed,” said Mike Smith, executive director of the compact commission, of which Wyoming is a member state. “We see this site as a step forward, and we expect it will evolve even more in the future.”

In hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, energy firms seeking hard-to-get-oil and natural gas pump water, sand and chemical additives underground under pressure to break open obstructions and open ways for trapped oil and gas to flow.

Only three Wyoming wells and the ingredients used to frack them are included in the database — all of them owned by Oklahoma City-based Chesapeake Energy Corp., one of 24 companies to register as participants on the site.

“We encourage every other producer and their respective service company partners to enthusiastically embrace this approach,” said Aubrey McClendon, Chesapeake’s chief executive, in a media release.

Updated site

So far, Chesapeake is one of 11 companies to update the site, the company said.

That number should grow in time, said Tom Doll, superintendent of the Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission and the state’s representative to the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission.

“I think there’s a real shift to public disclosure at all levels,” Doll said. “Not just because of the requirements because of statute or rule, but it’s good business to show your level of awareness of these chemicals being applied in your wells, and that’s good for the public to see.”

The practice is growing increasingly common in several areas of the country, including Wyoming, where it has unlocked significant energy reserves and is a key part to the development of oil and natural gas resources in the state.

Fracking, however, has also attracted mounting public concern about its effect on groundwater, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is planning an in-depth study of the practice. That study will include several areas in Wyoming.

Fracking, and the content of the fluid pumped underground, is only regulated by state governments, although there is a push for broad federal involvement in regulating the practice.

Wyoming approved regulations last year requiring that companies practicing hydraulic fracturing must disclose what was in the fluid they pumped underground — information made public by the state.

The new national site will complement Wyoming’s disclosure rules, Doll said, because the new site allows the public to view information at wells across the country.

After some initial speed bumps, companies have adjusted to Wyoming’s regulations, Doll said.

No problems

“We’re having compliance and no problems,” he said.

“It’s been well-received by the industry and, I believe, the conservation groups.”

Yet, for those groups and some members of the public, disclosure is just the first step toward regulating a practice that they fear is polluting groundwater.

“Our concern is that just focusing on disclosure allows the real issue of requiring prevention of contamination or harm to slip through the cracks and be ignored,” said Jill Morrison of the Powder River Basin Resource Council, a landowners group.

“If we focus our attention solely on disclosure, we are diverted from the real issue of protection from contamination.”