



EPA asked to reopen probe

200 groups call for reopening investigations into Parker County fracking, water contamination

Newsroom America
January 29, 2014

(NEWSROOM AMERICA) – A coalition of concerned organizations has called on President Obama and EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy to reopen investigations into the connection between drilling and fracking for oil and gas and contaminated groundwater in Parker County and to ensure residents there have access to safe drinking water.

Initiated by Americans Against Fracking and signed by more than 200 groups, the letter also asked the administration to meet with residents whose water has been contaminated, just as the administration has met with representatives from the oil and gas industry.

“President Obama is in danger of leaving a toxic legacy if his administration doesn’t get its facts straight on fracking,” said Food & Water Watch Executive Director Wenonah Hauter. “The EPA needs to take responsibility for the mess caused by fracking, and once and for all, assess the risks of fracking to the public.”

The development comes on the heels of the EPA Inspector General’s report on the agency’s investigation in Parker County that confirmed that the regional EPA office was justified in intervening on behalf of local residents.

The report found that the EPA pulled out of litigation with oil and gas companies as part of an agreement with Range Resources that assured the company would participate in a national agency study on the relationship between hydraulic fracturing and drinking water contamination.

The report also found that EPA agreed to let Range Resources take over testing the wells in Parker County, even though the agency lacks quality assurance information on the testing.

Range Resources reported finding no concerning widespread methane contamination in the families’ wells. However, just this month, Bloomberg reported that independent tests conducted by Duke University found high levels of combustible methane in the wells, contradicting Range Resources’s findings.

John Armstrong, of Frack Action said, “The Inspector General’s report and Duke University’s water tests show that affected residents’ water and health have been left at risk. President Obama and EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy must act swiftly to ensure residents’ safety and to reopen the investigation into water contamination from fracking.”

The letter concludes, “It is incumbent upon you to correct your administration’s troubling abdication of responsibility and denial of the

science on fracking and the harms it is posing to Americans across the country. As more than 250,000 Americans have already urged and the evidence compels, we ask that you swiftly act to re-open the EPA's investigations in Texas, Pennsylvania and Wyoming.”

The EPA dropped similar investigations in Dimock, Pa., and Pavillion, Wyo. In Dimock, it has since been revealed that EPA dropped its investigation against the wishes of the Philadelphia EPA office, the agency that had been monitoring drinking water there.

In Pavillion, EPA abandoned its investigation even after linking high levels of chemicals, including benzene, to fracking, handing the investigation over to the state with ongoing research funded by EnCana, the same drilling corporation under investigation for the contamination.

Earlier this month, EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy noted in a letter to the National Resources Defense Council, in response to its request to reopen and complete the three investigations, that it was not necessary to do so because residents affected by contamination could find alternative water supplies or treatment systems.

A recent Associated Press review found many confirmed cases of water contamination from fracking, noting that the review casts doubt on the industry's assertion that fracking and drilling don't affect drinking water supplies.

This builds on evidence from 2013 and 2011 Duke University studies that found systematic evidence that methane associated with shale gas extraction contaminates drinking water.

Moreover, a University of Missouri School of Medicine study released in December linked fracking to the presence of dangerous hormone-disrupting chemicals in the water near fracking sites, including the Colorado River.

The groups are calling on the Obama Administration to correct what they believe to be a troubling denial of the science on the effects of fracking. Late last year, Interior Secretary Sally Jewell called on the oil and gas industry to clear up “confusion” about the effects of fracking, a call to action that troubled many fracking opponents, as it dismissed concerns about water pollution and climate change linked to the process.