



Environmentalists target fracking in Gulf of Mexico

By Beatriz Pascual Macias.

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The Center for Biological Diversity has sued the U.S. government, alleging it has failed to release public documents revealing the extent and risks of offshore hydraulic fracturing by oil and gas companies in the Gulf of Mexico.

The public has a right to know where, when and how much fracking the federal government is allowing in the Gulf of Mexico," Kristen Monsell, an attorney with the center, said.

The lawsuit, filed in federal court in Washington, D.C., argues that the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement must disclose permits, reports, e-mails and other documents related to the federal government's approval for oil and gas companies to frack offshore wells in the gulf.

"Offshore fracking has been shrouded in secrecy in the gulf, but we know this dangerous activity pollutes our water and air and poses a toxic threat to marine wildlife and fragile ocean ecosystems," Monsell said in a statement.

Hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," is a technique used to produce natural gas and crude oil from shale.

Fracking involves pumping a pressurized fluid - usually composed of water, sand and chemicals - into a shale formation to create a fracture in the rock layer and release trapped petroleum or natural gas.

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, both under the Interior Department, have "allowed oil and gas companies to frack at least 115 offshore wells in the Gulf of Mexico in 2013, or 15 percent of those scheduled for that year," the group's lawsuit, to which Efe had access, said.

Oil and gas extraction operations, according to the center's figures, are ongoing on the coastline and the impact of fracking could affect the same communities hit by pollution after the BP-operated Deepwater Horizon oil platform exploded in 2010.

"There is no transparency in the gulf and we really don't know what is going on," Shaye Wolf, who holds a doctorate in climate science and works for the center, told Efe. "We don't know which chemicals are mixed with water to fracture rocks, we don't know if fracking is causing earthquakes."

"Hydraulic fracturing is related to low-scale earthquakes," Wolf said, adding that a recent study in California found that micro quakes due to fracking may have major consequences. EFE