

The League of Women Voters of Colorado is pleased that the EPA's Office of Research and Development will be conducting a scientific study to investigate the possible relationships between hydraulic fracturing and drinking water.

Mounting evidence indicates that impacts on water and air quality are more than anecdotal. The League requests that the EPA consider the following in defining the scope of their study.

1. There is a potential for drinking water supplies to become contaminated from spills. The industry reported to the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission 924 spills between 2002 and 2006, and a 1,000 spills totaling 5.2 million gallons of drilling liquids and oils were reported in the last 2 1/2 years. Besides direct contamination, it is possible for the water/chemical mix to leak onto the ground and migrate through the soil into wells. What impact these spills are having on our water supplies and on the health of citizens should be examined more thoroughly.
2. Disposal of fracking water into injection wells can cause additional well water contamination problems from displacement of deep underground water. Appropriate tests indicating displacement should be conducted in the proximity of injection wells.
3. We encourage the EPA to not only examine the results of existing studies but to test their validity and, in many cases, conduct new studies. An exhaustive examination of the methane problem on Colorado's Western Slope was released by Garfield County, Colorado in December 2008. It concluded that gas drilling has degraded water in dozens of waters wells. Another data source is a water-monitoring program in Southwest Colorado which tested for potassium chloride, not proprietary fracking chemicals which would be a more definitive marker.
4. Because flowback and chemical spills can affect both surface and in-ground drinking water sources, we strongly urge the EPA to consider surface drinking water contamination in its study (if it is not already included).
5. Natural gas is the cleanest of all fossil fuels, however its production as we know is not without consequences. Additionally, we strongly urge the EPA to expand the scope of this study to include air quality.

These points are addressed in more depth in a memo sent to the EPA.

This year, the League of Women Voters of the United States adopted a resolution supporting significant strengthening of the regulation, oversight, inspection, and penalties with regard to the development of fossil fuel resources. We are concerned that immediate energy needs and exemptions for drilling and mining have taken precedence over the preservation and protection of the environment. We hope the results of a comprehensive study will result in measures that will protect our waters, air, and the health of our citizens from known and unintended consequences of hydraulic fracturing.