

Casey, House Members Introduce Companion Bills To Protect Drinking Water from Natural Gas Fracking

American Public Deserves to Know Chemicals Used Near Their Water Sources

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WASHINGTON, DC– U.S. Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) joined U.S. Reps. Diana DeGette (D-CO), Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) and Jared Polis (D-CO) today to introduce companion Senate and House bills, the FRAC Act -- Fracturing Responsibility and Awareness of Chemicals Act, amending the Safe Drinking Water Act. The legislation would repeal a Bush administration exemption provided for the oil and gas industry and would require them to disclose the chemicals they use in their hydraulic fracturing processes. Currently, the oil and gas industry is the only industry granted an exemption from complying with the Safe Drinking Water Act.

“Drilling for natural gas in the Marcellus Shale across much of Pennsylvania is part of our future,” said Senator Casey. “I believe that we have an obligation to develop that natural gas responsibly to safeguard the drinking water wells used by 3 million Pennsylvanians. We already have private wells contaminated by gas and fluids used in hydraulic fracturing. We need to make sure that this doesn’t become a state-wide problem over the next few decades as we extract natural gas.”

Hydraulic fracturing – also known as “fracking”, which is used in almost all oil and gas wells, is a process whereby fluids are injected at high pressure into underground rock formations to blast them open and increase the flow of fossil fuels. Fracking is used in areas of Pennsylvania where natural gas is being drilled from Marcellus Shale.

This injection of unknown and potentially toxic chemicals often occurs near drinking water wells. Three million Pennsylvanians are dependent on private wells for water. Troubling incidents have occurred around the country where people became ill after fracking operations began in their communities. Some chemicals that are known to have been used in fracking include diesel fuel, benzene, industrial solvents and other carcinogens and endocrine disrupters.

Regulating hydraulic fracturing under the Safe Drinking Water Act as done with the FRAC Act has been endorsed by 14 environmental organizations in Pennsylvania including: PennFuture; the Mountain Watershed Association and the Pennsylvania Forest Coalition.

“When it comes to protecting the public’s health, it’s not unreasonable to require these companies to disclose the chemicals they are using in our communities – especially near our water sources,” said U.S. Rep. DeGette, Vice Chair of the Committee on Energy and Commerce. “Our bill simply closes an unconscionable Bush-Cheney loophole by requiring the oil and gas industry to follow the same rules as everyone else.”

“It's time to fix an unfortunate chapter in the Bush administration's energy policy and close the 'Halliburton loophole' that has enabled energy companies to pump enormous amounts of toxins, such as benzene and toluene, into the ground that then jeopardize the quality of our drinking water,” U.S. Rep. Hinchey, Member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and the Environment and Member of the House Natural Resources Committee, said. “Our legislation says everyone deserves to have safe drinking water by ensuring that hydraulic fracturing is subject to the protections afforded by the Safe Drinking Water Act. The bill also lifts the veil of secrecy currently shrouding this industry practice.”

“Families, communities, and local governments are upset that the safety of their water has been compromised by a special interest exemption, and we join them in that frustration,” said U.S. Rep. Polis.

"It is irresponsible to stand by while innocent people are getting sick because of an industry exemption that Dick Cheney snuck in to our nation's energy policy. Many new sources of energy, including natural gas, will play an important role in our nation's transition to cleaner fuels, but we must make sure this isn't at the expense of public health. The problem is not natural gas or even hydraulic fracturing itself. The problem is that dangerous chemicals are being injected into the earth, polluting our water sources, without any oversight whatsoever."