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API guidance document discusses fracing's surface impacts

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WASHINGTON, DC, Feb. 2 -- The American Petroleum Institute released a third guidance document for hydraulic fracturing, covering practices to minimize associated surface environmental impacts. Two earlier guidance documents present well construction and integrity guidelines, and describe best practices for water management.

The latest document, HF-3, deals with recommended practices at the surface of wells which use fracing to produce oil and gas from tight shales. "We're trying to prevent runoff of materials from the site," explained Stephanie Meadows, a senior policy advisor at API.

"The idea is to keep materials there in a properly constructed containment area," she told reporters during a Feb. 2 teleconference. "There also is a big push for producers to speak with local authorities and landowners about what's going on. HF-3 also deals with handling any materials which leave the site."

The new document does not replace RP-51R, "Environmental Protection for Onshore Oil and Gas Production and Leases," a recommended practice which API adopted in July 2009, Meadows said. That document discusses environmentally sound practices and reclamation guidelines for all domestic onshore production operations, including water handling and gas compression facilities. HF3 tries to address surface environmental impacts specifically associated with fracing and complement the two earlier fracing guidance documents.

Meadows said that API's release of the latest fracing guidance document was timely since US President Barack Obama was scheduled to visit Pennsylvania on Feb. 3 to discuss economic recovery and job creation measures.

"While he's there, he will be standing on top of the second-largest natural gas formation in the world, the Marcellus Shale, which potentially could supply significant amounts of gas, produce new revenue for states and communities, and provide a major number of new jobs," she said. "We call on the president to lend the full weight of his office to development of this resource in New York, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia."

More information about HF-3 and other API standards and recommended practices associated with fracing can be found at API's web site.

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