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EPA Committed To Regulating Natural Gas Drilling, Official Says

By **Stephanie Gleason, Of DOW JONES NEWSWIRES**

WASHINGTON -(Dow Jones)- The Environmental Protection Agency has the authority to regulate natural gas drilling and is committed to doing so, EPA Deputy Administrator Robert Perciasepe told a Senate committee Tuesday.

"We are taking action," Perciasepe said. "EPA's responsibility in oversight is one we are pushing forward in a very strong and strenuous way."

Hydraulic fracturing, a practice of drilling for natural gas, is exempt from some environmental laws, but he said that the EPA is able to regulate natural gas drilling through federal clean water regulations.

"If improperly managed, natural gas extraction and production, including hydraulic fracturing...may potentially result in public health and environmental impacts," Perciasepe said.

Congress has asked the EPA to do additional studies of hydraulic fracturing, saying regulators don't have all the information needed to make a decision about natural gas drilling.

"Given the array of potential impacts and the need for more study, the state of New York is taking a timeout on hydraulic fracturing," Senate Environment and Public Works Chairman Barbara Boxer (D., Calif.) said.

Sen. Robert Casey, (D., Pa.), whose home state is experiencing a wave of new gas exploration, has proposed new regulations for natural gas drilling.

"It's very simple; we're trying to close a loophole that's in the law now," Casey said. His legislation would change the Safe Drinking Water Act to make sure new natural gas drilling methods are covered by the environmental law. The legislation also would require disclosure of the chemicals being used in the drilling process.

Sen. James Inhofe (R., Okla.) said there hasn't been a confirmed case of groundwater contamination. The U.S., he said, could run for 90 years on natural gas and reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil, "but you can't get natural gas from these deposits without hydraulic fracturing."

Sen. John Cornyn (R., Texas) was also critical of new gas exploration regulation, saying more "red tape is death by a thousand cuts" for the natural gas industry.

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