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# Toxins Found In Gas Drilling Fluids

By [STEPHEN POWER](#)

WASHINGTON -- The drilling fluids used to recover natural gas and oil from deep shale formations contain substances identified as human carcinogens, or listed as hazardous under federal clean air or water rules, according to a report issued late Saturday by senior House Democrats.



Associated Press

Jennifer Roger holds a sign of protest across the street from a working natural gas well drilling in Flower Mound, Texas, on Nov. 29, 2010.

Democrats on the House Energy and Commerce committee described their report as the first comprehensive national inventory of chemicals used by companies that engage in a process known as hydraulic fracturing.

The composition of hydraulic fracturing fluids has become a key point of tension between the oil and gas industry, which has been reluctant to disclose the specific contents of drilling fluids, and those who say such disclosure is necessary to determine whether hydraulic fracturing poses a threat to drinking water.

The gas industry has said it will voluntarily disclose the composition of drilling fluids. The Democratic paper noted that disclosure to this database will be voluntary, and "will not

include the chemical identity of products labeled as proprietary."

Citing data submitted by the companies to the House Energy and Commerce Committee in response to requests from the panel's Democratic members, the report says that drilling fluids used by the companies contained 29 chemicals that are known or possible human carcinogens, regulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act for their risks to human health, or listed as hazardous air pollutants under the Clean Air Act. Among these substances, according to the report: Methanol, benzene, sulfuric acid and lead.

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[Report: Chemicals Used in Hydraulic Fracturing](#)

The report says the substances used by the companies also include generally harmless and common substances, such as salt and citric acid. Some companies also used instant coffee and walnut hulls in their fracturing fluids, the report says.

The Democratic report, says that between 2005 and 2009, more than a dozen leading energy companies have used more than 780 million gallons of drilling fluids containing roughly 750 different chemicals and components.

Hydraulic fracturing and other techniques have unlocked large reserves of shale oil and gas that wasn't previously accessible, leading to a boom of new wells across the country and a sharp decline in natural gas prices.

President Obama has been promoting greater use of natural gas as a way to help the country reduce its reliance on oil. Mr. Obama in a speech last month, touted legislation in Congress to encourage wider use of natural gas as a fuel for vehicles.

But environmentalists and some residents of areas recently opened to development by hydraulic fracturing have said the process can pollute drinking water supplies. The industry has said these fears are unfounded.

The Environmental Protection Agency has been investigating whether hydraulic fracturing poses a threat to ground water. Under current law, most hydraulic fracturing is exempted from regulation by the EPA under the Safe Drinking Water act.

Rep. Henry Waxman (D., Calif.), the top Democrat on the Energy and Commerce committee, had sought data from energy companies last year, while still committee chairman, on the fluids used in their hydraulic fracturing operations.

A spokesman for Energy in Depth -- a Washington-based group that represents oil and gas producers -- said that while fracturing fluids "contain things you would never want to drink ... the only way that'd be relevant in a public-health context is if those materials were somehow finding their way into potable water supplies underground. Naturally, Waxman has no ability to show that, precisely because they aren't, don't, and according to regulators, never have."

A spokesman for America's Natural Gas Alliance added that its member companies "support the disclosure of hydraulic fracturing fluids through the Ground Water Protection Council registry, which is run by state regulators. This registry was launched just last week and is providing information to the public about the hydraulic fracturing process, including the composition of the fluids used."

The report could stir further calls by some lawmakers for federal regulation of hydraulic fracturing, which involves injecting a mixture of water, sand and chemicals underground at high pressures to release oil from hydrocarbon deposits.

"It is deeply disturbing to discover the content and quantity of toxic chemicals, like benzene and lead, being injected into the ground without the knowledge of the communities whose health could be affected," said Rep. Diana DeGette (D., Colo.) who released the report along with Mr. Waxman and Rep. Edward Markey (D., Mass.)

"Of particular concern to me is that we learned that over the four-year period studied, over one and a half million gallons of carcinogens were injected into the ground in Colorado. Many companies were also unable to even identify some of the chemicals they were using in their own activities, unfortunately underscoring that voluntary industry disclosure is not enough to ensure the economic benefits of natural gas production do not come at the cost of our families' health."

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