

Talisman resumes drilling

'Fracking' suspended across North America for eight days after incident

BY KEVIN DOUGHERTY, POSTMEDIA NEWS JANUARY 28, 2011

Calgary's Talisman Energy Inc. suspended all "fracking" operations for about eight days across North America this month after what it described as "a well-control incident" in Pennsylvania.

Talisman spokeswoman Phoebe Buckland said from Calgary Thursday that the company halted all its fracking operations after "a water-based fluid release" at its Pennsylvania well and notified the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

"These sorts of incidents, we take very seriously," Buckland said.

"Safety is our absolute first priority."

Pennsylvania's Department of Environmental Protection made the incident public on Wednesday.

Fracking, or hydraulic rock fracturing, is the process of drilling horizontal wells then pumping a mixture of water, chemicals and sand under pressure to break rock formations, releasing natural gas trapped in shale.

Quebec Premier Jean Charest and his ministers, while saying shale gas must pass environmental and health tests before it is developed, have been largely supportive of the new energy source, saying shale gas would reduce Quebec's \$14-billion annual imports of oil and gas.

Shale gas also is being developed in other provinces and the United States, and is seen as a less-polluting substitute for oil and coal.

But concerns have been raised that the fracking process will have unwanted environmental and health consequences.

Environmentalists have warned that fracking can contaminate the water table with the chemicals and can inject natural gas into drinking water.

Talisman, which is developing five of Quebec's 31 shalegas wells, stopped fracking at the time of the Jan. 16 incident in Pennsylvania and only resumed the procedure on Wednesday.

Quebec's environmental impact agency began a study on shale gas last fall, hearing briefs from the public, environmentalists and the gas exploration companies.

The agency also visited other provinces and states where shale gas is being developed.

Its report is expected by Feb. 28.

Talisman currently has no drilling or fracking operations in Quebec, Buckland noted. Fracking operations in Quebec are planned at two wells in the spring.

In B.C. there are two shale gas proposals in the Horn River Basin near Fort Nelson and the Montney formation that surrounds Fort St. John

Last week, Quebec Environment Minister Pierre Arcand announced the province would step up inspections at shale gas drilling sites, saying he was "starting to ask questions" because of a leak that occurred in November at a Talisman well in Leclercville, southwest of Quebec City.

"The industry is not in control of the situation," Arcand said.

A recent study by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency found preliminary evidence that while still cleaner than coal, natural gas from shale gas wells gives off more greenhouse gases than its promoters have admitted.

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