

EPA to study natural-gas drilling's effect on water

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The Environmental Protection Agency announced Thursday that it will launch a \$1.9 million study into how drinking-water supplies are affected by [hydraulic fracturing](#), a method used to turn shale rock into natural gas wells.

The practice, which has been used for decades, unlocks natural gas by shattering shale rock with high-pressure blasts of water, chemicals and sand. Starting a well requires millions of gallons of water and results in some leftover water that is contaminated; drilling companies say it can be safely contained, but environmentalists argue that this residue could endanger public drinking supplies.

Paul T. Anastas, assistant administrator for the EPA's Office of Research and Development, said EPA "research will be designed to answer questions about the potential impact of hydraulic fracturing on human health and the environment."

Natural gas companies and environmental advocates said they welcomed the study. William F. Whitsitt, executive vice president for public affairs at [Devon Energy Corp.](#), which engages in hydraulic fracturing, said he hoped that the EPA would reach out to state officials who have overseen the activity.

"When there are concerns about hydraulic fracturing, we take them very seriously," he said.

[PennEnvironment](#) Director David Masur said that while research is welcome, his group expected the federal government to take a precautionary approach when it comes to having contaminated water stored beneath drinking-water supplies. "We want the facts, and this is the start of getting that," he said.