

# Firms report using diesel in fracing

**Use not a violation of EPA agreement, Halliburton says**

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Two major companies involved in hydraulic fracturing acknowledged pumping thousands of gallons of diesel in the ground despite concerns about the practice at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, according to information provided to a congressional committee.

*Hopefully, we're getting a little bit closer to some disclosure here.*

- Bruce Baizel, attorney, Oil and Gas Accountability Project

The Energy and Commerce Committee is leading an investigation into hydraulic fracturing - a technique used extensively in the San Juan Basin to release methane gas from coal beds in the Fruitland Formation.

A news release issued Thursday by the committee said Halliburton and BJ Services - two of the three largest companies that perform the service - used diesel fuel in their fracturing fluids between 2005 and 2007. In a 2003 agreement with the EPA, the companies voluntarily pledged not to use diesel in hydraulic fracturing.

Halliburton spokesman Diana Gabriel said the use it reported was not in violation of the agreement because the accord applied only to coal-bed methane wells and not conventional wells.

"Halliburton is firmly committed to full compliance with the memorandum of agreement and has, in fact, voluntarily gone further to cease the use of diesel in its liquid gel concentrates regardless of the type of hydraulic fracturing job in which they are used," Gabriel wrote in a statement.

A call to BJ Services headquarters in Houston was not returned.

Fracing has been credited with unlocking vast reserves of natural gas, but environmentalists say it has the potential to contaminate drinking water supplies.

In 2005, Congress exempted hydraulic fracturing from federal regulation under the Safe Drinking Water Act in what has become known as the "Halliburton loophole."

Companies have refused to divulge all the chemicals in their fracing fluids, arguing that doing so would cause them to lose their competitive edge.

Bruce Baizel, an attorney with the Oil and Gas Accountability Project in Durango, said it is good that the companies are cooperating with the committee.

"Hopefully, we're getting a little bit closer to some disclosure here," he said in a phone interview Thursday.

He said Halliburton, which has an office in Farmington, and BJ Services have performed hydraulic fracturing for gas companies operating in the San Juan Basin.

According to the committee's news release, Halliburton reported using more than 807,000 gallons of seven diesel-based fluids, and BJ Services reported using 2,500 gallons of diesel-based fluids.

The companies also indicated they used other potentially toxic chemicals.

Gas companies have argued the chemicals pose little threat because they do not mingle with water supplies. But proponents of greater oversight say the potential for contamination had not been adequately disproven.

Baizel said that safer mixtures are available.

"It's not as if they can't use other fluids to get their work done," he said.

In September 2005, Halliburton issued a news release promoting its diesel-free fluids.

"Halliburton continues to improve on a technology that it first commercialized in 1949 - hydraulic fracturing - by introducing its new Zero-D (trademarked) diesel-free liquid gel concentrates. This industry-leading advancement will help operators move to higher levels of environmental performance."

U.S. Rep. Diana DeGette, D-Colorado, has introduced a bill that would get rid of the Halliburton loophole and require companies to disclose the chemicals in their fracturing fluids.

In a news release Thursday, DeGette cited the companies' revelations as justification for the legislation.

"Natural gas is an important fuel for our energy future, but we must ensure that the way we retrieve natural gas does not endanger drinking water," she said.

U.S. Rep. Henry Waxman, D-California, who is chairman of the energy committee, has asked eight additional gas and oil companies to provide information on fracing.

"This investigation will help us better understand the potential risks this technology poses to drinking water supplies and the environment, and whether Congress needs to act to minimize those risks," he was quoted as saying in the news release.

Christi Zeller, executive director of the La Plata Energy Council, said she is confident further investigation will prove out the industry's assertion that fracing is safe and necessary.

"Hydraulic fracturing is an essential component of producing clean-burning energy in America today," she said in a statement.

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