

# State seeks action in illegal CBM spill

By DUSTIN BLEIZEFFER - Star-Tribune energy reporter | Posted: Thursday, February 25, 2010 12:00 am |

The Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality recently issued a notice of violation to a coal-bed methane producer for allegedly spilling 10,000 barrels of coal-bed methane water in western Campbell County.

Williams Production RMT Co., the largest coal-bed methane producer in Wyoming's Powder River Basin, told DEQ that the spill had not reached any existing waterways, according to state documents.

However, upon inspection by DEQ staff on January 14, it was observed that the spilled coal-bed methane water indeed had entered Barber Creek, making the spill a violation by allowing "the discharge of any pollution or wastes into the waters of the state," according to the notice of violation.

A Williams spokesman told the Star-Tribune that the company is gathering information and plans to meet with DEQ staff within the next couple of weeks.

"We take these matters seriously and will work with the agency to take appropriate corrective measures if necessary," said Williams spokesman Kelly Swan.

Last year, Williams Production paid \$2,400 to DEQ to settle another illegal discharge of coal-bed methane water in Campbell County. A concerned landowner had alerted DEQ to the alleged violation, according to DEQ documents.

## Getting a grip

In February 2008, the federal Bureau of Land Management's Buffalo field office issued a memo to coal-bed methane gas operators stating, "Recently, there have been an extraordinary number of spills and undesirable events reported to the Buffalo field office."

Because of the number of spills and a lack of timely self-reporting by the industry, BLM officials outlined what qualifies as a spill and how to report the events.

State regulators now say spills are not as prevalent in the coal-bed methane gas fields.

"I think industry is doing a better job. Part of that may be just because infrastructure that had problems has been fixed," said Brian Lovett, inspection and compliance program supervisor for DEQ's Water Quality Division.

Lovett explained that cold snaps can wreak havoc on water pipelines and other water facilities because they can freeze up. Overall, Lovett said the industry seems to have gotten a better handle on freezing and spilling challenges.

"Looking at the amount of infrastructure out there and the number of spills, I certainly don't think it's unreasonable," said Lovett.

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