AP report on inadequate fracking inspections draws attention to nothing, really.

By ACSH Staff — June 16, 2014

Information obtained from the federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) by the Associated Press [1] shows that a substantial fraction of the sites deemed to be at higher-than-average risk of accidental contamination from oil and gas development and exploration sites on public land have not been inspected on schedule. Those thought to be at higher risk include wells near national parks and watersheds.

A careful reading of the article and the data contained therein show a potential problem, given the lack of adequate funding for the BLM and the salary disparity for petroleum engineers able to do the inspections: private-sector engineers command an almost three-fold higher wage than federal hires, leading to another bottleneck. However, good news awaits those patient enough to penetrate all the concerns and inadequacies, to wit: of the nearly 500,000 producing gas wells on private lands in 2012, which are inspected by private and state’s inspections rather than the federal BLM, there is no mention of any actual significant water-contamination or other environmental adverse events, merely citizens expressing concern about possible harms. One resident, in New Castle, CO (the article’s dateline), opined about her fears of potential health hazards. but the story itself notes that the nearby drilling has been ongoing for over 12 hours daily for three years, yet she had no comment related to actual events. Among the 100,000 wells on public lands, almost 3,500 received the high priority designation; 1,400 (40 percent) had not been federally inspected.

ACSH’s Dr. Gil Ross, who helps to oversee ACSH’s Facebook page, Facts About Fracking [2], had this perspective: The news media took a brief look at this report and ran wild with it, as commonly occurs. I won’t even bother to note the anti-fracking zealots reaction. But without dismissing out-of-hand the real need for appropriate regulation and oversight of high-volume hydraulic fracturing sites (known commonly as fracking), there is nothing alarming in this report whatsoever (as opposed to alarmist, which is here aplenty). Since federal lands are not susceptible to state oversight, it seems reasonable to have professionals with appropriate expertise in the employ of the Dept. of the Interior/Bureau of Land Management take on that task; it’s unfortunate that the funding for the BLM and the penurious salary scale for experts, combined with the surge in shale
gas development have conspired to render inspections unduly slow. This should be corrected indeed, with appropriate funding and a faster rate of such inspections. But this is far from the emergency portrayed in many headlines and sound-bites today.

Source URL: https://www.acsh.org/news/2014/06/16/ap-report-inadequate-fracking-inspections-draws-attention-nothing-really

Links