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## House Natural Resources Committee examines U.S. helium production

On July 11, 2013, the House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held an oversight hearing to discuss the future of helium production in the U.S. The subcommittee heard testimony regarding the current and future U.S. demand for helium, the Federal Helium Reserve, and permitting for helium production.

Currently the Federal Helium Reserve, which provides the U.S. with 50 percent of its helium, is set to close at the end of the fiscal year. The House of Representatives passed a bill (H.R. 527) in April that would extend the life of the reserve. The Senate is slated to vote on a related bill (S. 783) but until a law is enacted, closure of the Helium Reserve remains imminent. In order to avoid reliance on foreign helium sources, it is important to evaluate and understand the existing helium resources on U.S. public and federal lands.

The hearing focused on new technologies and updating permitting process which will increase helium production in the U.S. Technologies in development at Oak Ridge National Laboratory would allow the development of “low-grade” fields, which have lower concentrations of helium, but larger quantities. The Bureau of Land Management said that they are working to update a variety of permits, such as drilling permits where helium is the primary target.

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