

BLM introduces hydraulic fracturing regulations

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On March 11, the Obama Administration and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) introduced new regulations on hydraulic fracturing on federally-managed land. The new rules would tighten requirements on 750 million acres of federal and Indian lands where BLM oversees the subsurface mineral estate. The regulations require disclosure of chemicals used in the hydraulic fracturing process through FracFocus.org, an industry-financed website, and ban pits at well sites, requiring wastewater to be stored in covered tanks. To address concerns about “frac hits” or “downhole communication,” where fluids from hydraulic fracturing travel to nearby wells and potentially result in surface spills or aquifer contamination, the rules require that casing and cementing follow best practices, and require reporting the trajectory of the well bore, the pressure of the hydraulic fracturing fluid, and the depth of the well being hydraulically fractured, as well as locational data of all well bores within a 0.5 mile radius. The BLM rules would only apply to 11 percent of hydraulic fracturing operations currently operating in the U.S., and state regulations that are stricter than the new rules will take precedence. Currently only 13 of the 32 states where hydraulic fracturing occurs on BLM land have regulations. The Western Energy Alliance and Independent Petroleum Association of America have filed a lawsuit in Wyoming District Court to block the new regulations. Senator Jim Inhofe (R-OK) introduced a bill to “clarify that a State has the sole authority to regulate hydraulic fracturing on Federal land within the boundaries of the State” (S.828). Democrats criticized the rules as being a “lowest common denominator” approach, and environmentalists have disparaged the new regulations for being too lax, citing stricter requirements needed after “downhole communication” surface spill events in neighboring Alberta, Canada.

Source: Bureau of Land Management, Congress, E&E News
