

**Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR)**  
***House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology***  
***Joint Hearing of Environment and Energy Subcommittees:***  
***Lessons Learned: EPA's Investigations of Hydraulic Fracturing***  
**July 24, 2013; 10:00 AM**

Opening Statement

Thank you, Chair Stewart and Chair Lummis. Over the past several years we have seen a substantial expansion of fracking for oil and gas across the country. As this expansion continues, we must not ignore the potential public health risks that may be caused if the operations of fracking companies contaminate drinking water. I want to thank the Chairs of the subcommittees for recognizing the importance of this issue by including in the Hearing Charter that a focus of the hearing will be to examine the EPA's investigations and "ascertain any lessons that might be learned from these experiences and used to inform and improve the EPA's ongoing study of the potential impacts of hydraulic fracturing on drinking water resources."

Hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," emerged as a commercial success in large part because of federal investment in developing today's fracking technologies. Although fracking has boosted shale gas exploration to make it a formidable economic driver, providing increased energy security and creating jobs, the fast pace and enormous scale of fracking for shale gas may be putting our water resources at risk.

Our surface and groundwater resources are under tremendous strain throughout the country. Population expansion, residential and industrial development, droughts, and limited precipitation not seen before in some areas of the country have all contributed to this strain. These circumstances make access to clean water and the EPA's study even more important. If we want to enjoy the advantages and economic benefits of shale gas development, we must do so with the highest regard for safety and the protection of our precious water resources.

We have heard about exploding drinking water wells and families with children who are exposed to potentially harmful levels of methane gas in their drinking water – we should all be concerned about what could happen going forward. Fracking for shale gas is predicted to continue for some time. State, federal, and tribal leaders, in addition to Americans all over the country, are alarmed about whether their drinking water is at risk, and they deserve answers to their questions.

The current debate over fracking goes beyond groundwater and includes well integrity concerns, documented induced seismicity events, and potential negative impacts to the health of workers at these facilities. Though the primary focus of the EPA study we will discuss today is the connection to drinking water resources, all of these concerns and important questions must be addressed.

Some, especially from the industry, submit that no additional studies are needed, that Americans should trust that the industry knows what it's doing, or that federal interference is unnecessary because states are already implementing their own best practices. Although some states may be up to the managerial task if they have demonstrated knowledge of local geology, hydrology, and infrastructure, other states are not as prepared. Some have only begun to develop rules establishing best practices for companies operating fracking facilities within their borders.

The oil and gas industry has a history of adopting environmental measures only after the drop of the regulatory gavel by federal or state environmental regulatory authorities. Accordingly, EPA's role - aided by the rigorous peer-review process overseen by the EPA Science Advisory Board - must figure prominently in this debate. State and tribal leaders will need the results from the fracking study to formulate stronger policies to protect their water resources and the health of their citizens. And, hopefully, communities will have answers to the questions about drinking water safety that they have long been asking their state and federal leaders.

Since the initial passage of the Environmental Research, Development, and Demonstration Authorization Act almost 40 years ago, the role of the EPA has been to ask and answer the most challenging scientific questions related to industrial activity in our communities. Their scientific research, in collaboration with states, tribal authorities, industry, community leaders, and other stakeholders, has led to the development of clearer and stronger environmental policies and practices over the decades. The result of that collaboration has been unquestionable benefits for our economy, certainty for industry, and protection of our water quality. Without a better understanding of the fracking water cycle and the impacts to drinking water and groundwater, we will not know enough about the potential risks to equip states and localities with the tools necessary to keep their citizens healthy and safe.

I look forward to hearing EPA's progress on its drinking water study. And, with that I yield back.