

Energy Alert

July 20, 2013

DOE Statement on Marcellus Shale Hydraulic Fracturing Study

[This is a revised alert reflecting updated information in a July 19 National Energy Technology Laboratory (NETL) media release, which clarified prior NETL statements on the hydraulic fracturing study contained in earlier media reports.]

The Department of Energy's NETL issued a statement July 19 regarding its comprehensive, year-long field study on hydraulic fracturing and drinking water in the Marcellus Shale. NETL stated that it is "in the early stages of collecting, analyzing and validating data," and "while nothing of concern has been found thus far, the results are far too preliminary to make any firm claims." In an April 2013 update, NETL said the study at test sites in Washington and Greene Counties in southwestern Pennsylvania "will provide an unbiased, science-based source of information which can guide decisions about shale gas development." Utilizing seismic testing and "man-made tracers" injected into the hydraulic fracturing fluids in the Marcellus Shale gas wells over 8,000 feet in depth, NETL is monitoring older, shallower, sandstone wells at 4,000 feet – at least 3,000 feet below drinking water aquifers – to determine if there is "communication" between the Marcellus Shale and the sandstone units above. The monitoring project offers the federal government first-of-its-kind access to a company's drilling operations and, according to NETL, "multiple lines of evidence" in testing for water contamination. NETL geologist Richard Hammack reportedly characterized the large amount of field data that the studies have yielded to date as "the real deal" and likely to be analyzed "for years to come." NETL said that it expects a final report on the study results by the end of the year.

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