region6news

Wednesday, February 26, 2014

Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and 66 Tribal Nations

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1 – BP begins oil production at major Gulf of Mexico deepwater hub, Times Picayune, 2/25/14
http://www.nola.com/business/index.ssf/2014/02/bp_begins_oil_production_at_ma.html
BP has started production at a key offshore oil and gas hub, its third major deepwater drilling project to begin flowing oil and gas in the Gulf of Mexico this year, the company said this week. The project falls in line with the oil giant's broader strategy to ramp up high-margin oil and gas production at four of its platforms in the region.

2 – EPA inspector general reports on agency response to an event that never happened at a company that doesn't exist, Dallas Morning News, 2/25/14
http://thescoopblog.dallasnews.com/2014/02/epa-inspector-general-reports-on-agency-response-to-an-event-that-never-happened-at-a-company-that-doesnt-exist.html/
The Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Inspector General, which does internal audits and investigations, has released a report on the management of debris after a Texas tragedy last year.

3 – Offshore wind farms can tame hurricanes, study finds, New Star, 2/26/14
http://www.thenewsstar.com/usatoday/article/5813425
Billions of dollars in U.S. damage from mega-storms Katrina and Sandy might have been avoided with a perhaps surprising device - wind turbines. That's the finding of a ground-breaking study today that says mammoth offshore wind farms can tame hurricanes rather than be destroyed by them. It says a phalanx of tens of thousands of turbines can lower a hurricane's wind speed up to 92 mph and reduce its storm surge up to 79%.

4 – Nuclear Waste Repository Set to Reopen After Leak, New York Times, 2/25/14
http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/26/us/nuclear-waste-repository-set-to-reopen-after-leak.html?hp=&_r=0
Almost two weeks after an unexplained puff of radioactive materials forced the closing of a salt mine in New Mexico that is used to bury nuclear bomb wastes, managers of the mine are planning to send workers back in and are telling nearby residents that their health is safe.

5 – Explosion debris dumped in West wasn't hazardous, report finds, Dallas Morning News, 2/25/14
http://www.dallasnews.com/news/20140225-explosion-debris-dumped-in-west-wasn-t-hazardous-report-finds.ece?nclick_check=1
Debris from the West fertilizer explosion was not hazardous and did not contaminate local drinking water after it was moved to nearby property, according to a federal report released today. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's inspector general reviewed a tip that pesticides, herbicides or other substances may have been inside piles of rubble dumped on private land across from the blast site. Once put there, the tip said, the chemicals may have seeped into the water supply through a break in an underground main.

6 - Colo. is first state to limit methane emissions from oil and gas production, Climate Wire, 2/25/14
http://www.eenews.net/climatewire/2014/02/25/stories/1059995047
On Sunday, Colorado became the first state in the nation to limit methane emissions from oil and gas operations. After four days of hearings, the state's Air Quality Control Commission adopted rules that will require oil and gas companies to find and fix methane leaks, as well as install technology that captures 95 percent of emissions of both volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which cause air pollution, and methane.

7 - Fracking boom spews toxic air emissions on Texas residents, Kansas City Star, 2/25/14
http://www.kansascity.com/2014/02/25/v-print/4847910/fracking-boom-spews-toxic-air.html
When Lynn Buehring leaves her doctor's office in San Antonio she touches her inhaler to be sure it's close. About 40 miles down the road, flares trailing smoke appear. A yellow-brown haze can fill the horizon as Buehring, 58, passes into Karnes County, where she was born. Today, the ranch house she shares with husband Shelby, 66, is at the epicenter of one of the nation's biggest oil and gas booms, with more than 50 wells within 2.5 miles.

8 - EPA data used to map Houston-area cancer risk, Houston Chron, 2/25/14
http://blog.chron.com/healthzone/2014/02/epa-data-used-to-map-houston-area-cancer-risk/#20870101=0
Using data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Houston's Cite Magazine has mapped the region's cancer risk by census tract, indicating areas closer to the Ship Channel and the city's center have a higher cancer risk than others. The Houston architecture and design review, published quarterly by the Rice Design Alliance, created its cancer-risk maps with 2005 National-Scale Air Toxics Assessment data. The alliance is a nonprofit organization advocating for improvement of the Houston-area's quality of life.

9 - Oklahoma Gas and Electric Co. makes plans if court declines regional haze review, Oklahoman, 2/26/14
http://newsok.com/oklahoma-gas-and-electric-co.-makes-plans-if-court-declines-regional-haze-review/article/3937275
The parent company of Oklahoma Gas and Electric Co. plans to use a state law to recover environmental compliance costs from customers if it loses a case awaiting possible review at the U.S. Supreme Court, executives at OGE Energy Corp. said Tuesday. The court is expected to decide by some time early in the second quarter if it will review a regional haze case appealed by OG&E, Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt and a group of industrial energy consumers.

10 - EPA Fracking Guide Revives Industry Fears On Retroactive Enforcement, Inside EPA, 2/25/14
http://cleanenergyreport.com/201402252462246/Clean-Energy-Report-Daily-News/News/epa-fracking-guide-revives-industry-fears-on-retroactive-enforcement/menu-id-202.html?s=dn
EPA's recent guidance for crafting Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) permits for hydraulic fracturing operations that use diesel fuels, the only type of fracking subject to the drinking water law, is reviving industry fears that the agency could pursue enforcement actions against operators for past injections of diesel fuels without permits. The Feb. 11 guidance on how permit writers should adapt existing underground injection control (UIC) rules for oil and gas wells signals that the agency believes it is on solid legal ground to retroactively enforce permit requirements, though the guidance says that EPA does not have any policies on enforcement actions for past violations.

11 – Regulator defers to Legislature as Texas continues to talk electric reliability, Energywire, 2/26/14
http://www.eenews.net/energywire/2014/02/26/stories/1059995142
The head of Texas' Public Utility Commission said regulators plan to let lawmakers decide on major electric market changes, sparking a day of discussion on how to judge reliability amid a fast-growing population. Chairwoman Donna Nelson, speaking yesterday at a conference in Austin, said her job is to make sure the state Legislature understands what going in different directions with the market would mean. A regular Texas legislative session is set to begin in 2015.

12 – Frisco Accuses Exide Of Being In Default of Agreement, CBS DFW, 2/25/14
http://dfw.cbslocal.com/2014/02/25/frisco-accuses-exide-of-being-in-default-of-agreement/
It's been nearly two years since the city of Frisco and Exide Technologies agreed to shut down and demolish the battery recycling plant. But the CBS-11 I-Team has discovered the deal is in limbo. An attorney representing the city, Larry Boyd says, "The city believes Exide is in default." The plant ended operations in November, 2012. But Exide has yet to take down two buildings as agreed upon.

13 – Mississippi Oil Spill Highlights Risk of U.S. Oil Boom, Bloomberg, 2/25/14
http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-02-25/mississippi-oil-spill-highlights-risk-of-u-s-oil-boom.html
A barge crash that spilled enough oil to temporarily shut a stretch of the Mississippi River highlights the ransportation risks of the U.S. energy boom just as regulators respond to several rail accidents involving crude. A 65-mile portion of the river about 50 miles (80 kilometers) upstream from New Orleans reopened with restrictions yesterday as federal and state officials responded to a Feb.

14 - U.S. Chamber exec warns against overregulation of energy industry, City Wire, 2/25/14
http://www.thecitywire.com/node/31897#.Uw4CZ_ldWCk
A U.S. Chamber of Commerce official warned an Arkansas audience that overregulation of fracking practices in the oil and gas industry could cost jobs, tax revenue, and the overall economy.
Karen Harbert, the president and CEO of the U.S. Chamber Institute for 21st Century Energy, was a featured speaker at an Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce/AIA luncheon held at Heifer International's world headquarters.

15 - EPA approves Sercadis for full federal label in 2014, Delta Farm Press, 2/25/14
http://deltafarmpress.com/rice/epa-approves-sercadis-full-federal-label-2014
The Environmental Protection Agency has granted a Section 3 federal registration for the new fungicide, Sercadis, for use on strobilin--resistant sheath blight in the rice-growing southern states. Sercadis, which contains the active ingredient Xemium, has been available under a Section 18 emergency exemption to fight outbreaks of the resistant sheath blight in Louisiana for the past two growing seasons.

16 - EPA investigates, says West debris not hazardous, ABC 25, 2/25/14
http://www.kxxv.com/story/24823890/epa-investigates-says-west-debris-not-hazardous
Debris removed from the West fertilizer plant explosion and dumped into two piles nearby was not hazardous and did not contaminate the local water supply. That's the result of an investigation by the Office of Inspector General of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The federal agency's report was released Tuesday after it looked into an anonymous tip called into the EPA's hotline.

17 – (VIDEO) A small Texas town - and a fracking hotbed
http://www.msnbc.com/all-in/watch/a-small-texas-town-and-a-fracking-hotbed-170635843752
The former Mayor of Dish, Texas - an area strongly affected by fracking - weighs in on the controversy surrounding ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson.

Everything New Orleans

BP begins oil production at major Gulf of Mexico deepwater hub

2.25 bp na kika offshore platform.jpg
BP's Na Kika offshore platform in the Gulf of Mexico in November 2013. The company said it started new oil production at the platform on Feb. 19, 2014. *(BP p.l.c.)*

Jennifer Larino, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune By **Jennifer Larino, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune**
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on February 25, 2014 at 4:31 PM, updated February 25, 2014 at 4:32 PM

BP has started production at a key offshore oil and gas hub, its third major deepwater drilling project to begin flowing oil and gas in the Gulf of Mexico this year, the company said this week.

The project falls in line with the oil giant's broader strategy to ramp up high-margin oil and gas production at four of its platforms in the region.

The recent activity centers on BP's Na Kika field and production platform located about 140 miles southeast of New Orleans, in which BP owns a 50 percent interest. Royal Dutch Shell owns the remaining stake.

This is the third and latest phase of development at the Na Kika field, which started producing oil in 2003. The Na Kika platform sits in more than 6,000 feet of water.

BP has grown its operations there in recent months, drilling two new wells and building a system of subsea pipe and other equipment needed to tie the new wells back to the Na Kika platform.

BP brought the first oil well under the latest development phase into production on Feb. 19. A second well is expected to start up in the second quarter.

The company is also installing new equipment to boost production at an existing well at the site.

The investment could boost Na Kika's daily production from up to 130,000 barrels of oil equivalent to up to 170,000 barrels.

The Na Kika project is among a number of projects expected to come online in the Gulf in coming years, potentially pushing the area to record high oil production by 2016.

BP has started up two other major deepwater projects so far this year, its Chirag oil project in the Caspian Sea and the Mars B project also in the Gulf of Mexico.

Shell, which operates Mars B, started production at the field's Olympus platform, a move that is expected to boost production by 100,000 barrels per day, according to a **report** by FuelFix this month. BP owns a 28.5 percent working interest in the project.

BP plans to invest about $4 billion annually in the Gulf over the next decade, with much of the spending centering on four of the platforms it operates in the area - Thunder Horse, Na Kika, Atlantis and Mad Dog.

New leasing could also factor into the company's spending plans.

BP America Inc. CEO John Minge, in a speech to the Louisiana Mid-Continent Oil and Gas Association in New Orleans on Feb. 19, said that the company was nearing an agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Justice that would again allow the company to bid on federal contracts, **according to The Associated Press**.

The suspension was put in place in November 2012 after BP pleaded guilty to criminal counts tied to the 2010 Deepwater Horizon rig explosion, which killed 11 men and unleashed the worst offshore oil spill in U.S. history.

It's still unclear whether the parties will reach an agreement prior to **federal lease sales in the central and eastern Gulf planned for March 19 in New Orleans**.

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EPA inspector general reports on agency response to an event that never happened at a company that doesn't exist

By Randy Lee Loftis
rloftis@dallasnews.com
3:52 pm on February 25, 2014 | Permalink

84 21 Share 3 0 6

The Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Inspector General, which does internal audits and investigations, has released a report on the management of debris after a Texas tragedy last year.

The trouble is, the report deals with an explosion that didn't happen at a company that doesn't exist.

Here's the opening:

"On April 17, 2013, a fire caused an anhydrous ammonia explosion at the Adair Green Inc. Fertilizer Plant in West, Texas, known as the West Fertilizer explosion. The explosion caused multiple fires within a half-mile radius and resulted in 14 deaths and about 200 injuries."

Not close. Where to start?

The name of the company is not Adair Green. It's Adair Grain Inc., dba West Fertilizer.

There was no anhydrous ammonia explosion. In fact, making the stuff explode is nearly impossible.

As The Dallas Morning News noted within hours of the blast, media speculation that tanks of anhydrous ammonia had exploded was simply wrong. Tanks of anhydrous ammonia were the victims of the explosion, smashed and burned. They weren't the perpetrators. It was ammonium nitrate that blew up.

The human toll was 15 killed, not 14, and more than 300 injured, not 200.

But the Office of Inspector General did get the date right.

We've asked the OIG's news office to explain, but no one has responded.

From the web

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This entry was posted in Environment, Environmental Protection Agency, Federal government, West explosion, West Fertilizer Co. explosion by Randy Lee Loftis. Bookmark the permalink [http://thescoopblog.dallasnews.com/2014/02/epa-inspector-general-reports-on-agency-response-to-an-event-that-never-happened-at-a-company-that-doesnt-exist.html/] .

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donsanedrin 15 hours ago

So, a spelling error and the EPA actually under-reported how bad it really was and how many people died and got injured.

I guess people will find any reason to be anti-EPA, but if you want them report the explosions as something worse than what they wrote up, that's alright by me.

Reply Share 1 0

Hugh Kaufman 11 hours ago

Randy I can't stop laughing. The EPA IG Office has been a tool of EPA Management and a joke for decades, and yet the main stream media gives them credibility. Glad you blew the whistle on them. ["In 1982, Anne Burford (Ronald Reagan's first chief of EPA) used the EPA IG Office to put Hugh Kaufman under surveillance. Kaufman had criticized Burford and her sidekick Rita Lavelle (who later served time in jail, thanks to Kaufman) for playing fast and loose with Superfund monies, so Burford set out to "get" Kaufman. She had him tailed by the EPA IG Office to a motel where he was photographed entering a room with an unknown woman. A gleeful Ms. Burford thought she had the goods to ruin Kaufman's career--to discredit him and perhaps even get him fired. Turned out the unknown woman was Kaufman's wife. And it was Burford who ultimately got fired as Kaufman turned the tables and left her twisting in the wind."]

Reply Share 0 0

Ravi Prakash 12 hours ago

I thought this was a news article, not an op-ed. But, Mr. Loftis proved me wrong. Anhydrous ammonia is stored in tanks at high pressure in liquid form. If the tank ruptures, the sudden release of pressure can result in a major explosion which appears to be the case here. Apparently, Mr. Loftis can't be bothered by science, when he has an opinion to share. BTW, how many spelling mistakes in today's edition of DMN?

Reply Share 1 reply 0 0

Hugh Kaufman 11 hours ago

It was an Ammonium Nitrate explosion, not an Anhydrous Ammonia explosion. http://rt.com/usa/west-texas-plant-explosion-289/

Reply Share 0 0

Peter Kurilecz 14 hours ago

what did you expect from a federal agency that is known to use inaccurate information.

Reply Share 0 0

Pat Patterson 15 hours ago

This is the US EPA - what else is new?

Reply Share 0 0

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Offshore wind farms can tame hurricanes, study finds

Filed Under USA Today news USA Today nation
Feb. 26, 2014 7:21 AM |
thenewsstar.com

Billions of dollars in U.S. damage from mega-storms Katrina and Sandy might have been avoided with a perhaps surprising device - wind turbines.

That's the finding of a ground-breaking study today that says mammoth offshore wind farms can tame hurricanes rather than be destroyed by them. It says a phalanx of tens of thousands of turbines can lower a hurricane's wind speed up to 92 mph and reduce its storm surge up to 79%.

Unlike sea walls, which protect cities from storm surges, wind farms pay for themselves by generating pollution-free electricity, says lead author Mark Jacobson, an engineering professor at Stanford University. "The additional hurricane (protection) benefit is free."

No offshore wind farms currently operate in the United States, although 11 are under development - mostly off the East and Texas coasts. Most of the world's offshore turbines are in northwestern Europe, but China is ramping up its capacity.

Jacobson says his study, published online in *Nature Climate Change,* is the first to look at how offshore turbines interact with hurricanes. He says the impact may seem surprising but makes sense: Turbines produce power by taking energy from wind and thus slowing it down.

His team used complex modeling to simulate the impact that tens of thousands of turbines - more than exist in any single wind farm worldwide - would have had on three hurricanes: Sandy and Isaac, which struck New York and New Orleans, respectively, in 2012 and Katrina, which devastated New Orleans in 2005.

An array of 78,000 wind turbines - each 50 feet tall - off New Orleans could have slowed Katrina's wind speeds up to 78 mph and cut its storm surge up to 79%. An even larger phalanx off the East Coast could have reduced Sandy's winds up to 87 mph and its storm surge up to 34%. These farms minimize a city's storm surge most when located directly upwind.

Jacobson says smaller offshore wind farms also reduce a hurricane's wrath but at a lesser rate. Overall, "turbines cost much less than sea walls to protect a city given that the turbines also generate electricity," says the study, co-authored by Cristina Archer and Willett Kempton of the University of Delaware.

"It's potentially significant," Mark Powell, atmospheric scientist at NOAA's Hurricane Research Division in Miami, says of the research, adding it shows an extra benefit of a carbon-free energy source.

"This is a pretty neat idea, but it's expensive and borderline feasible," says Stephen Rose, an expert on wind energy at Carnegie Mellon University. He led a 2012 study that said hurricanes could destroy some turbines. Yet his team later issued a correction, saying there's only a 7% risk of hurricanes destroying at least half of turbines off the Gulf Coast and almost no chance of such damage on the East Coast.

"It's not practical - 78,000 turbines," says Dominique Roddier, an engineer who's working on a new design for a floating wind turbine by Seattle-based Principle Power, referring to the size of wind farms in Jacobson's study. "That's an insane number of wind turbines. You can't build that many."

The two largest pending offshore U.S. wind farms - the Deepwater Wind Energy Center in New England and the Baryonyx Rio Grande Wind Farms in Texas - are each slated to have at most 200 turbines.

Jacobson says large offshore wind farms can be a more cost-effective way to generate power than fossil fuels, given the additional benefits of reducing pollution and hurricane damage. He says sea walls cost billions but don't produce power and even existing turbines can withstand wind speeds of up to 112 mph - typical of a Category 2 or 3 hurricane.

The U.S. Department of Energy, which is promoting offshore wind development along the coasts and the Great Lakes, says it's capable of generating four times as much electricity as do all current U.S. power plants.

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U.S.

Nuclear Waste Repository Set to Reopen After Leak

By MATTHEW L. WALD FEB. 25, 2014

Almost two weeks after an unexplained puff of radioactive materials forced the closing of a salt mine in New Mexico that is used to bury nuclear bomb wastes, managers of the mine are planning to send workers back in and are telling nearby residents that their health is safe.

The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, 28 miles east of Carlsbad, has been in operation for 15 years, burying wastes in an ancient salt bed deep beneath the desert, mostly without incident, and some experts have said that the site should be considered for additional kinds of nuclear waste.

But late on Feb. 14, at an hour when no one was in the mine, an air monitor indicated the presence of radioactive contamination. An automated system cut off most of the ventilation and routed the exhaust through filters that are supposed to capture 99.97 percent of all contamination, turning off fans and changing the air flow, in less than one minute.

This most likely minimized the contamination that reached the surface, according to the mine's monitors, who were on hand to reassure anxious Carlsbad residents at a town-hall-style meeting Monday night. The monitors told the residents that there had been no health risk at all and that the radiation levels detected near the mine's surface — far from town — were well below concern.

“For someone living in town, I would say the dose was probably zero,” Russell Hardy, director of the Carlsbad Environmental Monitoring and Research Center, an independent monitoring organization that is part of New Mexico State University, said in a telephone interview Tuesday. He said that the event would not add to background levels of radiation — including bomb fallout — any more than an eyedropper full of water would contribute to the rise in the level of the Pacific Ocean.

There was some small release of radiation, however. The Carlsbad research center registered the materials — plutonium and americium — on filter materials installed on air monitors in the surrounding desert. These filters must be collected and then dissolved in acid so the material they trapped can be analyzed. They can detect amounts far smaller than the device that registered the initial alarm, but the process takes many hours.

The materials registered on the surface are consistent with the material buried at the plant, but the quantities released are far below the levels at which the Environmental Protection Agency would recommend any action, officials said.

Even in the desert, the danger to humans was small, the mine’s operators said. The highest reading from the monitors indicated that a person could have inhaled radioactive material that would emit a dose, over the person’s lifetime, of 3.4 millirem, an amount roughly equal to three days of natural background radiation. But to get the dose, the person would have had to stand for hours in the desert, on the downwind side of the plant.

“The numbers are so low, we need really sensitive pieces of equipment that can detect these low numbers,” said Farok Sharif, the president and project manager for the contracting firm that operates the mine, the Nuclear Waste Partnership.

But the incident, whose cause will not be known until technicians can re-enter the area, has marred a close-to-perfect safety record at the plant, known by its acronym, WIPP. And it came a few days after a truck in the mine caught fire, although the events were said to be unrelated.

The Energy Department, which owns the repository, caught some criticism for the way it communicated the problems. “Information gaps can exacerbate fears and erode trust,” said Steven M. Becker, a professor in the College of Health Sciences at Old Dominion University, in Norfolk, Va., and an expert on communicating radiation risk. Managers have not said when technicians will re-enter the mine.

The plant accepts shipments from Energy Department laboratories and factories involved in nuclear weapons production. Some manufacturing plants from the Cold War era have been able to close because the repository accepted their waste. Officials have not said which sites packaged and shipped the materials that leaked.

A version of this article appears in print on February 26, 2014, on page A17 of the New York edition with the headline: Nuclear Waste Repository Set to Reopen After Leak.

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Explosion debris dumped in West wasn't hazardous, report finds

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REESE DUNKLIN
Staff Writer
Published: 25 February 2014 05:35 PM
Updated: 25 February 2014 05:43 PM

Debris from the West fertilizer explosion was not hazardous and did not contaminate local drinking water after it was moved to nearby property, according to a federal report released today.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's inspector general reviewed a tip that pesticides, herbicides or other substances may have been inside piles of rubble dumped on private land across from the blast site. Once put there, the tip said, the chemicals may have seeped into the water supply through a break in an underground main.

The EPA and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality were supposed to oversee debris removal. However, they said, an unnamed federal agency did it "without their knowledge."

The agency in charge of the water system, the Cottonwood Water Supply Corp., said it had known about the break and disconnected the main after the disaster, according to the report. The state, in addition, told the inspector general that tests had found the debris was "non-hazardous."

The inspector general's office said the review was conducted between last July and last month. Yet its report made some mistakes, as Randy Lee Loftis points out on our Scoop Blog.

The report, for example, said anhydrous ammonia had exploded on April 17 - rather than ammonium nitrate, the chemical that investigators determined had detonated. The report also referred to the business that blew up as Adair Green Inc. Fertilizer - rather than Adair Grain, which owned the West Fertilizer Co.

We've contacted the inspector general to clarify those points and get the name of the federal agency that moved the debris. When we get a response, I'll update the post.

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4. REGULATION:

Colo. is first state to limit methane emissions from oil and gas production

Stephanie Paige Ogburn, E&E reporter
Published: Tuesday, February 25, 2014

On Sunday, Colorado became the first state in the nation to limit methane emissions from oil and gas operations.

After four days of hearings, the state's Air Quality Control Commission adopted rules that will require oil and gas companies to find and fix methane leaks, as well as install technology that captures 95 percent of emissions of both volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which cause air pollution, and methane.

Parts of the state are already exceeding U.S. EPA limits for ozone, and the oil and gas industry is a large contributor of the VOCs that lead to ozone formation.

While other states have imposed limits on VOCs due to air quality concerns, no other state has regulated methane leaks from oil and gas.

"I think these rules are a model for the country," said Dan Grossman, the Rocky Mountain region director for the Environmental Defense Fund, which had pushed for the inclusion of methane in Colorado's new air quality rules.

If other states follow Colorado's lead, such rules could improve natural gas's climate change footprint.

Natural gas is primarily composed of methane, a gas with about 30 times the global warming power of carbon dioxide. While electricity from natural gas is generally regarded as better for the climate than electricity from coal, the more the natural gas system leaks, the less climate benefit it has.

As natural gas booms nationwide, the amount of methane leaking from the natural gas system -- from wellhead to homes -- has become a hot-button issue. Numerous studies have questioned EPA estimates of this number, saying they are too low (***ClimateWire***, Feb. 14).

Shift to a 'zero tolerance' position

And in Colorado, as natural gas production has expanded into new areas, the technique used to get that gas out of the ground -- hydraulic fracturing -- has also become a political football, with several towns banning the practice within their borders over concerns of effects on water quality.

The state's governor, John Hickenlooper (D), has largely supported industry and panned local efforts to control the practice, saying the state has regulatory authority, not towns.

But as oil and gas operations have become more controversial in the energy-rich state, Hickenlooper also threw his support behind the stricter air quality rules, calling for "zero tolerance" on methane emissions.

In a statement released Sunday, the governor expressed his support for the rules.

"The new rules approved by Colorado's Air Quality Control Commission, after taking input from varied and often conflicting interests, will ensure Colorado has the cleanest and safest oil and gas industry in the country and help preserve jobs," Hickenlooper said.

The governor has said in the past he wants to strike a balance between the state's need for a healthy oil and gas industry and citizen concerns about health and safety.

The rules, which were supported by some of the state's major oil and gas producers, appear to be an attempt to do that. They were crafted collaboratively with input from energy producers and the Environmental Defense Fund and have been supported by a number of environmental groups.

"The fact that these rule were the product of collaborative negotiations between leaders in industry and EDF means a lot," said Grossman, who expressed hope that similar processes could take place in other states.

Encana Corp., which has more than 4,000 wells in the state, supported the rules, along with Anadarko Petroleum Corp., Noble Energy Inc. and DCP Midstream Denver.

Producers applaud regulatory certainty

"These are tough but reasonable rules that provide us as an industry and as a company with regulatory certainty going forward," said Doug Hock, a spokesman for Encana.

Ted Brown, senior vice president of Noble Energy, also issued a statement supporting the rules: "We all want clean air, and we believe keeping methane in the pipeline and out of the air is the right thing to do. We believe these new rules will help improve air quality and enable responsible, economic energy development," Brown said.

Saving methane from leaking should also result in a financial benefit to the industry, since it should end up with more product to sell, Hock noted.

During a four-day public hearing in front of the Colorado Air Quality Control Commission, which made the final decision on the rules, the Colorado Oil & Gas Association (COGA) and the Colorado Petroleum Association argued against the methane controls in the rules.

These groups also pushed for companies to be exempt from frequent inspections if their previous inspection had found few leaks.

But their arguments did not lead to significant changes. On Sunday, the commission announced its final decision on the rules, leaving them largely intact from the draft proposal, which was released in November and included strict standards for both leaking methane and VOCs (***ClimateWire***, Nov. 20, 2013).

Doug Flanders, director of policy and external affairs at COGA, did not answer specific questions about the rules but issued a statement on them.

"The new rules accomplish much, which we support. Unfortunately, we were not successful in ensuring that the rule accommodates the differences in basins and operators. Nevertheless, we are committed to working with our operators, our communities, and the state to successfully and effectively implement these rules," Flanders said.

A news conference on the new rules will be held today. The final version was not available at press time but will be posted on the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's **website**.

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Posted on Tue, Feb. 25, 2014

Fracking boom spews toxic air emissions on Texas residents

By JIM MORRIS, LISA SONG AND DAVID HASEMYER
InsideClimate News

When Lynn Buehring leaves her doctor's office in San Antonio she touches her inhaler to be sure it's close.

About 40 miles down the road, flares trailing smoke appear. A yellow-brown haze can fill the horizon as Buehring, 58, passes into Karnes County, where she was born. Today, the ranch house she shares with husband Shelby, 66, is at the epicenter of one of the nation's biggest oil and gas booms, with more than 50 wells within 2.5 miles.

Known as the Eagle Ford Shale play, this 400-mile-long swath of oil and gas extraction stretches from East-Central Texas to the Mexico border. Since 2008, more than 7,000 wells have been sunk with an additional 5,500 approved. Energy companies, cheered by the state, envision thousands more. It's an "absolute game-changer," an industry spokesman said.

From their porch, the Buehrings can see and smell this gold rush. Three nearby processing facilities have permission to release 189 tons of volatile organic compounds, a class of toxic chemicals that includes benzene and formaldehyde, each year. That's more than Valero's Houston Oil Refinery disgorged in 2012. They also are allowed to release 142 tons of nitrogen oxides and 95 tons of carbon monoxide per year.

The regulation of oil and gas extraction falls primarily to the states, whose rules vary dramatically. States also enforce the federal Clean Air Act - a problematic situation in Texas, which has sued the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency 18 times in the last decade.

For eight months, InsideClimate News, the Center for Public Integrity and The Weather Channel have examined what Texas, the nation's biggest oil producer, has done to protect people in the Eagle Ford. What's happening in Texas also matters in Pennsylvania, North Dakota and other states where hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, has made it profitable to extract energy from shale. Our investigation reveals a Texas system that protects industry more than the public:

-Air monitoring is so flawed that Texas knows little about pollution in the Eagle Ford, an area nearly twice the size of Massachusetts.

-Thousands of facilities are allowed to self-audit their emissions, so authorities have no idea how much pollution they release.

-Companies that break the law are rarely fined. Of 284 complaints Eagle Ford residents filed in a recent four-year period, only two resulted in fines despite 164 documented violations.

-Texas lawmakers have cut the state's budget for environmental regulation since the Eagle Ford boom began, from $555 million in 2008 to $372 million in 2014.

-Since 2009, the number of unplanned toxic air releases associated with oil and gas production increased 100 percent statewide.

-Texas officials are often industry defenders, so residents of drilling areas are usually left to fend for themselves. Oil money is so ingrained in Texas culture that people like the Buehrings tend to become collateral damage.

-The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) is led by three commissioners appointed by Gov. Rick Perry, who favors dismantling the EPA. TCEQ officials often move to lucrative jobs as lobbyists for the industry they regulated. The Texas Railroad Commission, which issues drilling permits and regulates other aspects of oil and gas, is controlled by three elected commissioners who accepted more than $2 million in campaign contributions from the industry during the 2012 election cycle, according to data from the National Institute on

Money in State Politics.

-State legislators who regulate the industry are often tied to it. Nearly one in four lawmakers, or their spouses, has a financial interest in at least one energy company active in the Eagle Ford, a Center for Public Integrity analysis of personal financial disclosure forms shows.

"I believe if you're anti-oil-and-gas, you're anti-Texas," Republican state Rep. Harvey Hilderbran said in September.

The TCEQ declined interview requests. In a statement, it said air pollution isn't a problem. "The air monitoring data evaluated to date indicate that air pollutants in the Eagle Ford Shale area have not been a concern either from a long-term or short-term perspective," the TCEQ said. "Therefore, we would not expect adverse health effects..."

But a memorandum obtained through a public records request indicates the TCEQ knows its air monitoring is flawed. "The executive director has extensive records of underestimated or previously undetected emissions from oil and gas sites. These are not isolated instances but have occurred statewide and indicate a pattern," Richard A. Hyde, then deputy director of the TCEQ's Office of Permitting and Registration, wrote in the Jan. 7, 2011, memo. Hyde, now executive director, declined to comment.

Since drilling came to Karnes County, Lynn Buehring's asthma has worsened. Instead of using a breathing machine once or twice a month, she sometimes needs it every day. She has migraines so intense they've induced temporary blindness.

"There's nothing we can do," Shelby Buehring said. "Nobody is listening to us....I hate it here."

But others say the boom is worth it.

"The Eagle Ford Shale is the biggest economic investment zone in the entire world," said Steve Everley, who works in Washington, D.C., for Energy in Depth, an arm of the Independent Petroleum Association of America. "I mean, are we going to prevent people from having jobs? Are we going to relegate an entire section of the state to continued poverty or are we going to move forward with economic development?"

(InsideClimate News is a nonprofit, non-partisan news organization that covers clean energy, carbon energy, nuclear energy and environmental science. More information is available at http://insideclimatenews.org/.)

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Health Zone

A blog about health and medicine with the Chronicle staff

EPA data used to map Houston-area cancer risk

Posted on February 25, 2014 | **By Lora Hines**

PRINT 27

IMAGE 1 OUT OF 15

Vicky Kasala Productions / Getty Images

Common cancer questions, answered

Does avoiding hair dyes and sweeteners mean you'll avoid a cancer diagnosis? The National Cancer Institute debunks common cancer myths.

Using data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Houston's Cite Magazine has mapped the region's cancer risk by census tract, indicating areas closer to the Ship Channel and the city's center have a higher cancer risk than others.

The Houston architecture and design review, published quarterly by the Rice Design Alliance, created its cancer-risk maps with 2005 National-Scale Air Toxics Assessment data. The alliance is a nonprofit organization advocating for improvement of the Houston-area's quality of life.

Cite's maps, posted on its website, indicate the total risk for developing any type of cancer over a lifetime. They show a large area of cancer risk around Houston's east side near the Ship Channel that spreads west along the freeways.

Last year, newly formed group, the Healthy Port Communities Coalition, released results of its door-to-door, non-scientific health survey indicating dramatically higher asthma and cancer rates near the Ship Channel.

Of 378 people surveyed in the communities of Pasadena, Denver Harbor, Manchester and the Fifth Ward, 27 percent reported being diagnosed with asthma or other respiratory disease. The coalition

also said its survey also found a significantly higher rate of cancer among port residents.

Categories: Cancer
Tags: Cancer risk | Environmental Protection Agency

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Houston Chron : Please dig deeper and faster - you know that they have been testing the Park Place area with 5ft tall canisters tied to telephone poles for about 10 years and you haven't said much about what was going on. There are a lot of people affected by this and need answers. We all need to know who is putting out the toxins and how to contain it immediately. And if the politicians see no urgency in the matter please challenge them to bunk down on Park Place until a remedy is fast coming.

Oklahoma Gas and Electric Co. makes plans if court declines regional haze review

Oklahoma Gas and Electric Co. executives said Tuesday the electric utility will use a state law for pre-approval of environmental compliance costs if it's unsuccessful in getting the U.S. Supreme Court to review a lower-court challenge to a federal plan for regional haze.

By Paul Monies (/more/Paul Monies) (https://plus.google.com/100998321323581507732?rel=author) *Published: February 26, 2014*

The parent company of Oklahoma Gas and Electric Co. plans to use a state law to recover environmental compliance costs from customers if it loses a case awaiting possible review at the U.S. Supreme Court, executives at OGE Energy Corp. said Tuesday.

The court is expected to decide by some time early in the second quarter if it will review a regional haze case appealed by OG&E, Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt and a group of industrial energy consumers.

OG&E estimates following a federal plan for regional haze compliance could cost the utility more than $1.2 billion for installation of scrubbers on four coal units at two of its generating plants in Oklahoma.

"If we aren't successful before the Supreme Court, we will promptly file for recovery of the associated environmental costs under House Bill 1910," said OGE President and CEO Pete Delaney. "Passed in 2005, the law allows utilities in the state to recover mandated environmental expenditures."

Delaney made the comments in a conference call as the company released fourth-quarter earnings.

HB 1910 has been on the books for almost nine years, but utilities haven't used the law much to recover large environmental compliance costs from the Oklahoma Corporation Commission, which regulates utilities.

The law allows them to start recovering costs at the start of projects instead of waiting until upgrades are complete.

Delaney said the law doesn't specify how a utility will get reimbursed for the compliance costs. Typically, costs are either folded into a utility's asset base on which it's allowed to earn a certain rate of return or put into a separate "rider" for a more direct, cash reimbursement over a specified period.

"So it's actually pretty open in terms of how that recovery would go," Delaney said. "Of course, we all know that we're concerned about the impact on the customers and that the greater the cash earnings on our construction, the lower ultimate cost to customers, so we will strongly make that argument."

1 (/oklahoma-gas-and-electric-co.-makes-plans-if-court-declines-regional-haze-review/article/3937275/?page=1) | 2 (/oklahoma-gas-and-electric-co.-makes-plans-if-court-declines-regional-haze-review/article/3937275/?page=2) | Next Page (/oklahoma-gas-and-electric-co.-makes-plans-if-court-declines-regional-haze-review/article/3937275/?page=2)

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News

EPA Fracking Guide Revives Industry Fears On Retroactive Enforcement

Posted: February 25, 2014

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EPA's recent guidance for crafting Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) permits for hydraulic fracturing operations that use diesel fuels, the only type of fracking subject to the drinking water law, is reviving industry fears that the agency could pursue enforcement actions against operators for past injections of diesel fuels without permits.

The Feb. 11 guidance on how permit writers should adapt existing underground injection control (UIC) rules for oil and gas wells signals that the agency believes it is on solid legal ground to retroactively enforce permit requirements, though the guidance says that EPA does not have any policies on enforcement actions for past violations.

An industry source says that EPA's "handling of the issue" has created significant uncertainty about the possibility of retroactive enforcement.

The industry concerns date back to a 2010 statement posted on EPA's website which indicated that any fracking operations using diesel had to obtain UIC permits under SDWA for Class II wells -- which regulate enhanced oil recovery, oil and gas wastewater disposal and other industry practices.

The statement, which EPA eventually removed as part of a settlement with industry, cited the 2005 energy law that generally barred the agency from regulating fracking under SDWA except where diesel fuels are used. Congress preserved EPA's authority to address diesel because a 2004 study on coalbed methane showed exceedances of drinking water limits for diesel constituents, including benzene, near some drilling sites.

But in 2011, Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA) released data showing that despite the legislative prohibition, Halliburton and several other drilling companies had injected over 32 million gallons of diesel fuel or fracking fluids containing diesel fuel in wells in 19 states between 2005 and 2009, though none sought permits.

Despite Waxman's finding, environmentalists were concerned that EPA's settlement with industry in *Independent Petroleum Association of America (IPAA) v. EPA* forced the agency to drop the informal policy language on its website requiring permits and instead required EPA to defer the issue until issuance of the guidance.

Environmentalists said they feared the agency's action would halt any possibility of enforcement actions for unpermitted injections using diesel fuels, at least until EPA issued the guidance.

Language in the guidance, as well as related documents, now leaves the door open to enforcement actions for past diesel uses, reviving industry fears. For example, EPA in a Feb. 11 summary response to comments released alongside the final guidance acknowledges concerns in public comments that asked the agency to clarify it would not seek to retroactively enforce the guidance and that any liability for failing to obtain a Class II permit would be prospective from the date of the final guidance.

"The EPA notes that the interpretations in this guidance are based on existing statutory and regulatory requirements, and that the EPA did not need to issue this guidance in order to enforce such existing requirements for both past and current violations," EPA says in the response document.

But the agency adds that it "does not have a policy regarding enforcement actions for past violations of these requirements."

Industry's Fears

The industry source says such language exacerbates industry fears because the agency's argument -- reflected in the 2010 website language -- is "merely restating congressional action" taken in the Energy Policy Act of 2005 rather than promulgating a

new regulatory requirement. "Since this action occurred in 2010 -- five years after the law was passed, it opens a question of whether the failure to obtain a UIC permit prior to that time opens a producer to enforcement," the source says.

Further complicating the issue is that despite the permitting guidance, there are no existing UIC regulations specifically designed to govern fracking wells, which are temporary injections as opposed to permanent placement of wastewater and other fluids, the source says. "Despite EPA's efforts to contort the Class II disposal regulations in the Guidance Document, they are clearly not like fracturing rules that one would find if they went to state well construction/completion regulations," the source says.

Another complicating factor, the source adds, is that of the controversial definition of "diesel fuels" EPA used in the guidance, though the agency did opt to slightly narrow its description for the purposes of triggering the permitting requirements.

In response to industry concerns that the definition was overly broad because it included six substances, including kerosene and other products not considered diesel fuels under other environmental statutes, EPA eliminated one of the chemical identification numbers -- for crude oil -- and a reference to "diesel fuel constituents."

But the industry source, noting that SDWA does not contain any existing diesel definitions, says even the more narrow definition includes three products "not really sold as diesel fuel," leaving producers "unsettled regarding whether EPA would choose -- either at a national level or in one of the Regions -- to try to prosecute based on the vague information available to understand the status of the provision."

EPA's Guidance

The agency issued the guidance to aid permit writers is establishing conditions to ensure any fracking that uses diesel fuels is done in a way that is protective of underground sources of drinking water, since EPA had not previously indicated how such permits should be crafted. The guide offers recommendations for applying area of review requirements to the siting of fracking wells, such as including information on seismic history of a region and baseline geochemical data on existing underground sources of drinking water, setting requirements for permit duration after fracking activity ceases, well construction requirements and others.

While the final guidance is intended to apply to four states where the agency oversees Class II wells -- Pennsylvania, New York, Kentucky and Tennessee -- EPA also issued a memo to state and EPA UIC program directors that clarifies that all UIC programs -- including those in most oil and gas producing states, such as North Dakota, Texas, Wyoming, Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and others -- must require permits for diesel fuels.

Moreover, the guidance already appears to be affecting operations in non-delegated states. In a Feb. 14 newsletter issued by North Dakota Industrial Commission (NDIC) Department of Mineral Resources director Lynn Helms, the department says a review of a voluntary database of fracking fluid constituents shows that since April 2012, 15 instances of kerosene being used in fracking fluid -- used at concentrations of less than 4 ten-thousands of one percent. Since kerosene is included within EPA's diesel definition in the guidance, the department contacted the operator, who in response eliminated the product from its fracking fluids.

"We were given less than 24 hours advanced notice of publication in the Federal Register and are working really hard to let everyone know what chemicals will result in a underground injection control permit being required and what the permitting requirements are," the newsletter says. -- *Bridget DiCosmo* (bdicosmo@iwpnews.com)

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4. GRID:

Regulator defers to Legislature as Texas continues to talk electric reliability

Edward Klump, E&E reporter
Published: Wednesday, February 26, 2014

AUSTIN, Texas -- The head of Texas' Public Utility Commission said regulators plan to let lawmakers decide on major electric market changes, sparking a day of discussion on how to judge reliability amid a fast-growing population.

Chairwoman Donna Nelson, speaking yesterday at a conference in Austin, said her job is to make sure the state Legislature understands what going in different directions with the market would mean. A regular Texas legislative session is set to begin in 2015.

"It is time for the commission to step aside and let the Legislature make the decision," Nelson said. "We will, of course, continue to serve" as resources.

The commission has been talking about ideas such as a mandatory reserve margin, which would seek to make sure there's enough power during peak demand, and a capacity market, in which companies are paid regardless of whether volumes are needed. The state's main electric market currently is known as energy-only.

Much of Texas is handled by the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, or ERCOT, which is set to provide its latest outlook for capacity, demand and reserves Friday. With the push for a possible switch to a capacity market apparently slowing, speakers at the Infocast ERCOT Market Summit in Austin yesterday focused on what reliability means.

For some, that may be as simple as viewing a famous quarterback from Texas A&M University and sipping a cold beverage.

"Reliability is for the Texas Aggies to be able to watch Johnny Manziel on television, and when somebody comes home from work to be able to get supper and having ice in their drink," said John Fainter, president of the Association of Electric Companies of Texas. "That's what reliability is in the minds" of most Texans, he said.

Nelson said there is an ongoing balance between reliability and cost. She said her view is that Texas residents have reliability expectations, and she said regulators continue to examine the meaning of a power scarcity event in January.

"My position has always been based upon the belief that customers in Texas are accustomed to a certain level of reliability and they want to ... continue to see that level of reliability," Nelson said.

If a different level of reliability is chosen, security can still be maintained, said Brad Jones, a vice president with ERCOT. Security doesn't necessarily mean there wouldn't be rolling outages, which is different from a goal of preventing a blackout, Jones said.

An energy-only market is fine if economic efficiency is the main objective, as long as there is clear management of expectations and regulators aren't tempted to intervene when prices get high, said Samuel Newell of the Brattle Group, which recently released a study of electricity in Texas.

If there's a fair amount of risk aversion to high prices or perhaps one event in three years, then a capacity market and mandated reserve margin is the right direction, Newell said.

"It's, I guess, very fortunate that this problem that seemed like an emergency a couple of years ago now is not quite as urgent," he said, citing in part a reserve margin that looks healthy for several years.

Newell added: "I hope that doesn't make this question just go away, because I think resolving the policy objectives and resolving the market design direction would be very beneficial."

The Brattle study showed an energy-only setup could produce reserve margins higher than the economically optimal level. ERCOT, meanwhile, has announced revised forecasting methodology.

"Relative to her comments just a few months ago, Chairman Nelson has clearly backed away from her support for capacity payments to generators," Andy DeVries, an analyst with CreditSights who attended the Infocast event, said in emailed comments.

Nelson's opinion appears to be that the ultimate decision rests with the Texas Legislature, DeVries said.

It's an open question how the subject may move forward, Nelson said.

She said any price suppression makes it hard to attract market-based demand response and additional generation. Rules should put market participants on equal footing, including renewable energy, Nelson said, as enacting environmental policy through electricity can affect the market.

She said customers should only purchase variable-price products if they are willing to ride the ups and downs of the market. Nelson called for integrity in any market setup.

"If you start taking away the volatility, then you are changing the basic tenets of an energy-only market," Nelson said. "So I would say stay tuned."

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February 25, 2014 7:36 PM

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Jack moved to Dallas after three years at WESH-TV, the NBC affil...
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FRISCO (CBS 11 NEWS) - It's been nearly two years since the city of Frisco and Exide Technologies agreed to shut down and demolish the battery recycling plant.

But the CBS-11 I-Team has discovered the deal is in limbo.

An attorney representing the city, Larry Boyd says, "The city believes Exide is in default."

The plant ended operations in November, 2012.

But Exide has yet to take down two buildings as agreed upon.

In court documents, the city said it's not only concerned about default, but that it may have also other claims against Exide, including "…gross negligence, conspiracy, and… fraud."

Exide is in bankruptcy, and because of that, its obligations are on hold and under review by a judge.

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The city says it won't know if the company will stick with the deal or walk away from it until the company files a reorganization plan by the end of May.

Boyd says, "They may live up to all of it, they may live up to none of it. We just don't know today, and if they don't live up to it, then we'll have to rely on the state of Texas, and the federal government to enforce the environmental obligations that exist currently under the statutes."

The city's end of the obligation is also in jeopardy.

As part of the deal, Frisco agreed to pay $45 million to buy the 180 acres surrounding the plant that sits along the Dallas North Tollway, money that could go a long way for a bankrupt company.

Jim Schermbeck with Downwinders at Risk helped lead a community charge to shut down Exide. "I'm concerned it's in trouble."

He is particularly concerned that the crystallizer hasn't been demolished. "For this facility to become part of the back and forth between the two entities in their agreeent, it gives me concern because it could be one of the more contaminated places on the whole facility."

Until the facility closed, a one mile area around it was one of 16 in the U.S. that exceeded air quality standards for lead.

That's no longer the case since the plant stopped operating.

In a letter last month, Exide told the city it was surprised by its claim the company was in default.

Exide also claims the city knows it can't demolish the crystallizer yet, because it still uses it to treat wastewater before discharging it into the sanitary sewer system, which eventually flows into the system run by the North Texas Municipal Water District.

Exide issued a statement Tuesday saying the two buildings out here will eventually be torn down, and that any issues should be resolved during the bankruptcy.

The city says it has spent nearly $2 million dollars on the clean-up so far, and that if Exide doesn't comply with the agreement, it won't get any more money.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality says Exide is still assessing the site and that a report is due by March 31st.

From there, it will develop a plan to clean it up.

While the TCEQ has primary oversight of the site clean-up, the EPA will review the matter as well.

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Mississippi Oil Spill Highlights Risk of U.S. Oil Boom

By Brian Wingfield - Feb 25, 2014

A barge crash that spilled enough oil to temporarily shut a stretch of the Mississippi River highlights the transportation risks of the U.S. energy boom just as regulators respond to several rail accidents involving crude.

A 65-mile portion of the river about 50 miles (80 kilometers) upstream from New Orleans reopened with restrictions yesterday as federal and state officials responded to a Feb. 22 spill, which stalled shipments of goods including grain and chemicals on the nation's busiest waterway.

"We're facing the imminent risk of a barge disaster or a rail disaster" as more oil is shipped to the Gulf of Mexico for refining, Jonathan Henderson, a spokesman for the New Orleans-based Gulf Restoration Network, said by phone after attending a meeting with U.S. Coast Guard officials.

A surge in U.S. oil production, reflecting in part advances in drilling techniques, has unlocked millions of barrels of oil from geologic formations such as North Dakota's Bakken shale, reducing U.S. reliance on imports. It has also ignited a debate over how to safely get the oil to refineries after a series of rail accidents involving oil tank cars, including a July derailment that killed 47 in a Quebec city.

Backers of TransCanada Corp. (TRP)'s proposed Keystone XL project from Alberta to the U.S. Gulf Coast have said expanding pipeline capacity would be the safest means to transport crude.

Shipments Rise

Barge and tanker shipments of crude from the Midwest to the Gulf Coast jumped from virtually nothing in 2005 to 21.5 million barrels in 2012, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. The U.S. Gulf received a record 4.9 million barrels of crude from the Midwest in October.

"The absence of available pipeline capacity out of the Bakken directly correlates to increased crude shipments by other forms of transportation, such as barge or rail," Brigham McCown, a former director of the U.S. Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration under President George W. Bush, said in an e-mail.

"We're shipping four times more crude oil than we used to, and we haven't seen a fourfold rise in

incidents," he said by phone yesterday, referring to rail shipments only. "We need all modes of transportation" to ship the oil, he said.

A barge carrying light crude, like the type produced in the Bakken Shale, collided Feb. 22 with a tugboat on the river near Vacherie, Louisiana, about 50 miles from New Orleans, according to the U.S. Coast Guard. Photos from the incident show a gaping hole in the side of the barge.

Coast Guard

About 31,500 gallons -- or 750 barrels -- spilled into the river, and so far, 1,021 gallons of oil and water have been recovered, Petty Officer Matthew Schofield, a Coast Guard spokesman, said in a phone interview. He said he didn't have details on the total amount of crude the barge was carrying, or where it originated.

The Coast Guard said 29 vessels were backed up along the river during the shutdown.

Anne McCulloch, a spokeswoman for the American Waterways Operators, an Arlington, Virginia-based industry group, said in an e-mail yesterday that its members, which include tugboat and barge operators, are working with government agencies so that river commerce can proceed safely and efficiently.

"Water transportation is the safest, most efficient means of transporting many essential commodities, including petroleum products," McCulloch said.

She said the growth in barge shipments has not led to an increase in spills. In fact, she said, "we have seen an increase in the amount of oil carried on the water and a dramatic decrease in the amount of oil spills."

Keystone Pipeline

The Louisiana spill takes place amid debate over the Keystone XL pipeline, a $5.4 billion project that would ship crude from oil sands in Western Canada to the Gulf Coast for refining. Supporters, including the American Petroleum Institute, an industry group for producers including Exxon Mobil Corp. (XOM) of Irving, Texas, and Chevron Corp. (CVX) of San Ramon, California, have said the conduit will support thousands of jobs and move oil safely.

Sabrina Fang, an API spokeswoman, declined to comment on the Louisiana spill.

With the boom in U.S. oil production, the industry is increasingly relying on rail and barge shipments to get the crude to refineries. Oil shipments by train have jumped 400 percent since 2005, according to the Association of American Railroads.

Emergency Response

States including California, New York and Maine are drafting emergency response plans after oil-train derailments, including the fatal crash in Quebec and a December explosion of 400,000 gallons of crude on a BNSF Railway Co. train in North Dakota.

The U.S. Transportation Department today ordered shippers to test the chemical composition of oil to ensure it is being loaded onto train cars built to carry it.

Eddie Scher, a spokesman for the San Francisco-based Sierra Club, said oil companies need to be more careful in handling and shipping their product. Disasters including the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill are “not acts of God,” he said in a phone interview. “In every case, they’re companies cutting corners.”

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U.S. Chamber exec warns against overregulation of energy industry

Submitted by The City Wire Staff on Tue, 02/25/2014 - 3:11pm

story by Roby Brock, with Talk Business, a content partner with The City Wire
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A U.S. Chamber of Commerce official warned an Arkansas audience that overregulation of fracking practices in the oil and gas industry could cost jobs, tax revenue, and the overall economy.

Karen Harbert, the president and CEO of the U.S. Chamber Institute for 21st Century Energy, was a featured speaker at an Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce/AIA luncheon held at Heifer International's world headquarters.

Harbert touted a litany of energy statistics that highlighted that in the next 35 years the world's electricity demand will increase by 140%. Harbert also noted:

• The oil and gas industry created 9% of all American jobs in 2011;
• Oil imports are expected to decrease 60% by 2020;
• Oil and gas production has led to an American manufacturing renaissance as well as a return of chemical, fertilizer, and steel industries.

She said that the natural gas "fracking revolution" has helped feed the nation's energy demand. Harbert said that Arkansas is now the No. 4 natural gas producing state in the U.S., according to recently released 2013 data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA). According to a "marketed production" report from the EIA, Arkansas ranked 8th in 2012 in natural gas production.

During the past decade, shale gas production has risen from two percent of the nation's energy mix to 30% today. That number is expected to rise to 50% by 2035. But Harbert said regulatory intervention by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) could undermine that trend.

"What if the 13 federal agencies looking to regulate fracking are successful?" she said. "We have to keep it attractive."

Harbert said a Colorado ballot initiative to allow local governments to supersede state fracking laws could also be detrimental if other states follow suit.

According to Harbert, Arkansas' natural gas industry is expected to create 52,000 new jobs and produce nearly $900 million in tax revenue by 2020.

A relatively higher price and the continued production of natural gas from existing wells resulted in a record of $62.685 million in Arkansas' gross natural gas severance tax revenue during 2013. The tally was up more than 53% compared to 2012 collections and up more than 6.4% over the previous high set in 2011. In 2009, the first year of the severance tax hike, Arkansas joined the list of the nation's top marketed natural gas producers when sales of Arkansas natural gas spiked 57.5% to 690 billion cubic feet (Bcf). Arkansas natural gas sales rose another 36.1% to 939 Bcf of annual production in 2010, according to figures from the Arkansas Department of Finance and Administration and the federal Energy Information Administration.

Harbert also touted that coal, gas, oil and nuclear power must remain a crucial component of the nation's energy policy. She said that there is no quick or easy way to remove U.S. dependence on low-cost coal as a fuel for generating electricity despite efforts to replace it with alternative fuels.

"The dinner party is still going to be the same," she said. ""We're going to need it all."

Harbert is a former assistant secretary for policy and international affairs at the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). She was the primary policy advisor to the DOE Secretary and to the department on domestic and international energy issues, including climate change, fossil, nuclear, and renewable energy and energy efficiency.

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Scott Hamilton, director of the Arkansas Energy Office at the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, said Harbert's message is a welcome discussion in the state.

"The points she made are very valid," he said. "We have to have an energy focus in the U.S., and Arkansas has to continue to find ways to educate [this need] at the local level."

The U.S. Chamber has developed a nine-point action plan for U.S. energy policy.

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Delta FARM PRESS
TIMELY RELIABLE INFORMATION FOR DELTA AGRICULTURE

EPA approves Sercadis for full federal label in 2014

Delta Farm Press
Tue, 2014-02-25 12:50

The Environmental Protection Agency has granted a Section 3 federal registration for the new fungicide, Sercadis, for use on strobilin--resistant sheath blight in the rice-growing southern states.

Sercadis, which contains the active ingredient Xemium, has been available under a Section 18 emergency exemption to fight outbreaks of the resistant sheath blight in Louisiana for the past two growing seasons.

The strobilin-resistant sheath blight, which is the same disease as aerial web blight in soybeans, initially was found in a South Louisiana parish in 2012. It has continued to spread in South Louisiana and could move to other states, according to the LSU AgCenter's Don Groth.

"If it happened here, it can happen somewhere else," said Groth, an LSU AgCenter plant pathologist based at the LSU Rice Research Station in Crowley, La. "We think we have detected it further north into Allen and Evangeline parishes."

A speaker at the Rice Technical Working Group bi-annual meeting in New Orleans, Groth said the continued use of the same fungicide in both rice and soybeans led to the development of resistance. "If you challenge the population enough and put selection pressure against it, a resistant pathogen will develop."

BASF, the manufacturer of Sercadis, had been hopeful of receiving full registration for the product early in 2014. Alvin Rhodes, BASF technical service representative from Madison, Miss., discussed it and Sharpen herbicide during a new products session at the USA Rice Outlook Conference in St. Louis in December.

"Over the last few years, resistance has developed where they cannot use any other compound, but Sercadis has done an excellent job of controlling this sheath blight," he said. "Sercadis can control not only the resistant but also the non-resistant. In 2014, it should be labeled in all rice-growing states for control of *rhizoctonia solani* or sheath blight."

Sheath blight is a disease that seems to occur annually in southern rice fields or as aerial web blight in soybeans.

"Sercadis should be applied early, more as a preventative treatment, at the rate of 6 to 6.8 fluid ounces per acre and applied by air at seven to 10 gallons of water per acre for control of sheath blight," said Rhodes.

"Xemium is part of a compound known as Priaxor, which is a pre-mix of Xemium plus Headline, and it does an excellent job of providing broad spectrum disease control and for plant health benefits on soybeans and corn."

The use of Sercadis at the higher rate in 2013 made the product much more effective, Groth said. The

previous rate of 4.5 ounces per acre was increased to the higher rate. Application is normally most effective when applied around the boot stage of rice.

“The consultants I talked with liked it,” Groth said. “They thought the rice looked like fields sprayed with Quadris when it first came out.”

Groth said he is testing several new fungicides that may be available in two to three years. “There’s potential we will have resistance to Sercadis in five to six years,” he said. “If we have another product we could rotate with Sercadis, that would be the ideal situation.”

Fungicides have been used on rice since 1977, Groth said. Sheath blight in rice became a problem as more rice farmers started growing soybeans in rotation with rice, and the beans were also susceptible to the sheath blight pathogen which causes aerial blight. Before that, farmers rotated rice with pasture for cattle.

Much of Groth’s research has been accomplished with check-off money paid by farmers based on 5 cents for every 100 pounds of rice sold.

“Without this funding resource, the disease research could not have been done,” Groth said. “Getting a product like Sercadis approved by the EPA requires support from scientific data that our research provided.”

“These check-off dollars are well spent on the hard work by our staff at the station,” said Steve Linscombe, resident director at the Rice Research Station. “I’ve had many farmers tell me they would no longer be in business if it weren’t for our research, and much of that work could not be done without the check-off funds.”

For more information, go to http://deltafarmpress.com/rice/resistant-sheath-blight-changing-practices-louisiana

And http://www.basf.com/group/corporate/de/news-and-media-relations/news-releases/news-releases-usa/P-12-111

And http://deltafarmpress.com/rice-sheath-blight-fungicide-treatment-thresholds

Source URL: http://deltafarmpress.com/rice/epa-approves-sercadis-full-federal-label-2014

WEST

EPA investigates, says West debris not hazardous

Posted: Feb 25, 2014 11:08 PM CST

By Bruce Gietzen - email

WEST - Debris removed from the West fertilizer plant explosion and dumped into two piles nearby was not hazardous and did not contaminate the local water supply.

That's the result of an investigation by the Office of Inspector General of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The federal agency's report was released Tuesday after it looked into an anonymous tip called into the EPA's hotline.

The claim alleged three concerns:

1. Debris, possibly containing hazardous substances including pesticides and herbicides was placed in large piles on two properties adjacent to the West fertilizer plant.

2. Contamination from the two piles was potentially leaking into the local drinking water supply system through a broken water main directly beneath the two properties.

3. There are no immediate plans by the Texas commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) or EPA to address the piles and possible contamination.

The EPA conducted a review from July of 2013 until January of 2014. It determined the debris was moved by another federal agency into two piles on nearby property but it was non-hazardous.

TCEQ staff was aware there was a broken water main but it was determined Cottonwood Water Supply operated the supply lines in that area and those water mains were disconnected shortly after the explosion. They were then monitored daily.

The TCEQ staff also confirmed debris removal at the two properties is complete. It was removed, tested and found to be non-hazardous again, and was appropriately recycled or disposed.

To review the entire report, to to www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2014/20140224-14-P-0123.pdf.

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