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North Dakotans Appalled by Spill, Call for Hydraulic Fracturing Fluid Disclosure

In wake of spill, North Dakotans call on the Industrial Commission to institute scrutiny and hold companies accountable

Dickinson---Members of Dakota Resource Council are pointing to the second major reported spill in recent weeks as a reason why the contents of hydraulic fracturing fluid need to be disclosed.

The spill sits on the banks of Lake Sakawea, and at least 25,000 gallons threaten to contaminate the lake and local aquifer. Three days after the leak occurred, the spill has not been contained. The liquid is comprised of crude oil, volatile gas, and primarily hydraulic fracturing effluent, also known as 'fracking fluid.' The contents of such fluid are exempt from public disclosure.

"I'm astounded and extremely concerned," said Jim Stenslie of New Town. "I understand that fracking fluid is toxic. It sounds like [containment crews] can't even get to the problem to examine it. I think the Industrial Commission is being vague and choosing its words carefully because they're still in the dark about the negative impacts of this spill."

Fracking fluid, believed to contain hundreds toxic chemicals including benzene, toluene, 2-BE (2-butoxy ethanol), and diesel fuel is exempt from disclosure under the Safe Drinking Water Act. The blow-out 8 miles northwest of New Town is located on the Lower Tertiary aquifer.

"No one knows what's in fracking fluid. This is a big concern. How are we supposed to respond if we don't know what's going into the ground?" asked Dan Neurohr of Dodge. "The chemicals in frack fluid and the contingency plans that companies have for cleaning up spills need to be made public, for the good North Dakotans and future generations."

The Industrial Commission continues to stand by industry statements regarding the safety of hydraulic fracturing (fracking), and supports the industry's push for rapid and widespread fracking in North Dakota.

In addition to water threats, fracking effluent poses risks to air quality as well. According to presentation by Dr. Conrad Volz, Assistant Professor at the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health, "Flowback or produced water that returns to the surface and goes into a frack pond-pit or impoundment will offgas (become a vapor in air) its organic compounds into the air." The fluid in New Town is currently being stored in a lined pit before disposal. The liquid contains "organic compounds that could volatilize into the environment when brought to the surface [...] They are not easily removed from produced water."

"All I know is that it's dangerous and they better get it cleaned up," said JoAnn Anderson of Keene. "I can't depend on the Industrial Commission Oil and Gas Division to be transparent. This could destroy our land and our crops."

Dakota Resource Council and its members are calling for the Industrial Commission to act impartially and require the disclosure of fracking fluids.

Dakota Resource Council is a nonprofit, grassroots activist organization. The mission of DRC is to form enduring, democratic local groups that empower people to influence decision-making processes that affect their lives. DRC works to protect North Dakota's land, air, water, rural communities and agricultural economy.

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