

EPA finds Pennsylvania well water safe after drilling

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WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency said it did not find significant contamination in well water serving 11 Pennsylvania families, who feared that natural gas drilling had polluted their well.

Some residents of Dimock, a small town in northeastern Pennsylvania, complained that their well water turned cloudy and foul-smelling after an oil and gas company drilled for gas using hydraulic fracturing, a controversial extraction method that involves shooting water and sand laced with chemicals underground to unlock reservoirs of fossil fuels.

Those water quality concerns have made Dimock a watchword for possible environmental risks associated with natural gas drilling for many critics of the process.

In January, the EPA said it planned to test the water of 60 families in the area, where there is currently a state-imposed moratorium on hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. In a statement issued last week, the EPA said that analysis of water samples of the first 11 families "did not show levels of contamination that could present a health concern."

Cabot Oil & Gas Corporation, which drilled the wells, said the EPA's findings confirmed that its operations did not pollute the well water in Dimock. The company said, "We are pleased that data released by the EPA today on sampling of water in Dimock confirmed earlier findings that Dimock drinking water meets all regulatory standards.

The EPA cautioned that the sampling was meant to determine the presence of contamination, not the viability of fracking. "EPA has not done any detailed review to determine the cause" of the water problems in Dimock, the agency said in response to questions.

The EPA did find that six of the 11 homes had "sodium, methane, chromium or bacteria" in their well water but that concentrations were all "within the safe range for drinking water." The sampling results also found low levels of arsenic in the water of two homes, which will be re-tested.

The debate over well water and the safety of fracking has split Dimock. Some families say their experience should serve as a warning against fracking. Many other homeowners assert fracking is safe, and they resent the controversy their neighbors stirred up because of fears it might limit their royalties.

Craig Sautner, a Dimock resident, said that although the EPA has found his well water safe to drink, he wasn't convinced.

"I just drew some water out of my well the other day, and it was cloudy," he said. "I wouldn't drink the water, I'm sure they (the EPA) wouldn't drink it, and if you can't drink the water, then that is a health concern."

The EPA said that it would continue to provide fresh drinking water to homes where *contamination was found while it did additional testing.*