

Fracking in North Carolina? USGS to Study Baseline Drinking Water Conditions

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On November 15, 2011, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) announced a study of the water quality of private and public drinking water wells in two North Carolina counties, in advance of potential shale gas exploration. The study will be conducted by the USGS and the Duke University Nicholas School of the Environment. Water quality sampling and data collection will be conducted from November 2011 through September 2012.

Currently, there is no shale gas production occurring within North Carolina, as the State's regulations prohibit the use of horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing, the two technologies that made shale gas production economically viable. The USGS study will provide important baseline data of background concentrations of many contaminants that have been claimed by many plaintiffs and governmental enforcement agencies to have been caused by hydraulic fracturing operations, particularly methane. The study is part of a larger effort being conducted by the [North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources](#), which was directed by the North Carolina legislature to conduct a study and make recommendations on the potential development of shale gas in North Carolina.

Additionally, EPA's national [study](#) of the impacts of hydraulic fracturing on drinking water supplies will also provide important baseline data. EPA will perform case studies of two prospective fracking sites in Louisiana and Pennsylvania. Depending on the results of these studies, the data will be used by either plaintiffs and governmental agencies or defendants in toxic tort cases and enforcement actions alleging the contamination of groundwater due to hydraulic fracturing activities.

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