
Press Release

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Landowners Ask for Oil and Gas Rules Now

Huge Waste Spills Above Town Of Parachute Will Flow Into Water Used For Irrigation

Four large spills totaling over one million gallons of waste water in an area known as “Garden Gulch” north of Parachute has locals concerned about the quality of their irrigation water. The frozen waste water, much of it trapped in a huge ice waterfall, is starting to melt. The Garden Gulch area drains into west Parachute Creek, a source of irrigation water for many local landowners and the entire Town of Parachute.

The spill that was first uncovered months ago has resulted in a Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC) investigation into the spills but little to no information has been shared with the public.

Sid Lindauer, a third generation rancher who lives on West Parachute Creek stated, “They never informed any of us about the spill. We are all reading about it in the paper like everyone else. So far the state has not told us what was in the waste water and what threat it could pose to my livestock.” In the meantime, Sid is not allowing his horses to drink from the creek and is watering his horses manually with water from his home. Irrigation water for the Town of Parachute is turned on April 15.

Industry often uses a number of chemicals in the drilling of a well. Drilling muds typically use lubricants during the drilling process. Hydraulic fracturing can use any number of chemicals that are forced into the ground to fracture the gas-bearing rock formation to make the well more productive. The waste water that comes up from these wells can contain toxic or carcinogenic chemicals from the drilling process as well as petroleum by-products (condensates) that are also found in the rock.

Concern about the water quality has led Sid Lindauer and a local citizens group – the Grand Valley Citizens Alliance – to file a formal complaint with the COGCC. In the complaint, they argue the new legislation that was passed last year requires the involvement of the Colorado Department of Health and Environment as well as the Colorado Division of Wildlife in responding to a spill.

The COGCC is in the process of adopting new rules to offer more protection to public health and the environment and to involve the Division of Wildlife and the Department of Health and Environment, but those regulations have not been written yet. Regulations that have been discussed in stakeholder meetings on new COGCC rulemaking would require the industry to disclose what chemicals they used in drilling within 24 hours of a spill. Draft COGCC rules are expected in early April.

Liz Chandler, a local large animal veterinarian and the president of GVCA believes the legislation requires the state to act now – even before new COGCC regulations are passed. “The bill passed last

year requires that the health department engage in this spill. The public has the right to know what chemicals were used in the wells and if they pose a threat to human health or wildlife.”

GVCA believes that this is an example of why the legislation was needed and why new regulations should be passed as soon as possible.

“What if this happened in a watershed that provides the public drinking water rather than irrigation water? This incident is a clear indication that there should be additional regulations about where these waste pits are located and how they are constructed. It also seems clear that there are some places, like a watershed that provides clean drinking water, where open waste pits should be outlawed,” Chandler stated.

Chandler argues that instead of pits, many companies have started to employ best management practices such as piping their waste water to a central facility to be cleaned and re-used for drilling. Other companies have opted against waste pits entirely and have storage tanks on site.

“Our state needs common sense safeguards that will protect public health and wildlife,” Chandler said. “There is too much at stake to allow this industry to continue with business as usual.”

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Pictures of spills available at: www.wccongress.org

Western Colorado Congress is an alliance for community action founded 1980 that empowers people to protect and enhance their quality of life in western Colorado.