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EPA Administrator Says Fracking Can be Safe

By Pierre Bertrand

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson said she believes hydraulic fracturing can be done safely, a slightly more bullish tone than her previous cautious testimony before Congress.

Jackson told a forum the controversial drilling practice known as fracking could be conducted in a way that prevents environmental damage.

"I think that fracking as a technology is perfectly capable of being clean. I do. But it requires people who are doing it and innovators who use the technology to take some time to make sure that it's done right. And it requires smart regulation, smart rules of the road," Jackson said, the Ashbury Park Press reported.

Jackson also said fracking regulations don't have to extend beyond the state level. That would place her in accord with the industry funded American Petroleum Institute.

The EPA administrator spoke at Richard Stockton College in Galloway, N.J. Jackson, 50, is a chemical engineer. Before President Barack Obama appointed her chief, Jackson had been the agency's northeast regional administrator.

Northeastern states are considering possible environmental impacts of fracking. New York is reviewing proposed regulation. Maryland is working through legislation to have natural gas companies pay a fee to fund an environmental study. Pennsylvania this month enacted gas well impact fees to derive funds for local communities with drilling.

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New Jersey, which so far lacks recoverable natural gas, has banned the disposal, treatment and even transmission of fracking water from neighboring regions like Pennsylvania. Last month, the state legislature imposed a one-year fracking ban, joining New York, which has had a de facto moratorium in place until the state's environmental commissioner makes a final decision expected later this year.

Hydraulic fracturing involves the extraction of natural gas from rock formations underground. It fractures the rock using water, sand and chemicals, and opponents claim the practice is hazardous to the environment and water tables. Industry trade groups point out hydraulic fracturing has been around for decades and has so far no evidence ties it to environmental pollution.

The EPA, could soon prove either party wrong, however, as an impact study conducted by the agency is due by the end of the year. So far, federal regulators drawn tentative links to groundwater pollution and hydraulic fracturing in Wyoming, and water samples from rural Pennsylvania are being tested after regulators there noticed hazardous chemicals present in roughly 60 wells.