

Statement on the use of hydraulic fracturing ("fracking") in the European Union

In the last months, I have received many messages regarding the use of hydraulic fracturing ("fracking") in the European Union.

Hydraulic fracturing has taken place in Europe, especially in the context of tight gas production and in offshore projects, mostly in vertical wells as well as in the framework of shale gas exploration projects in a few Member States. Two Member States have prohibited the use of hydraulic fracturing practices for hydrocarbons exploration and exploitation (Bulgaria, France) and some have set up temporary moratoria (e.g. the Netherlands). A number of Member States have initiated, or are about to initiate reviews of the appropriateness of their national legislation (e.g. Denmark).

The European Commission takes note of the concerns and views expressed by many of you with regard to potential climate and environmental risks related to hydraulic fracturing activities.

Under the current EU legal framework, it is up to the Member States to ensure, via appropriate assessment, licensing, permitting as well as monitoring and inspection regimes, that individual hydrocarbons projects (including those using hydraulic fracturing practices) comply with EU's legislation. This includes, *inter alia*, provisions on the protection of health and the safety of humans and environment pertaining notably to the completion of environmental impact assessments, the protection of surface and groundwater, the management of waste from extractive industries, the registration, evaluation and authorisation of chemicals as well as to environmentally protected areas.

But the European Commission obviously has to ensure that EU environmental rules are adequate for this relatively new activity of "fracking". That is why it has set up (in 2012) a technical working group of Member States on environmental aspects of unconventional fossil fuels to exchange information about project developments, potential environmental risks and applicable technical and regulatory practices. More information on:

<http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm?do=groupDetail.groupDetail&groupID=2671>

At the beginning of September 2012 the Commission published three new studies on unconventional fossil fuels, in particular shale gas. The studies look at the potential effects of these fuels on energy markets, the potential climate impact of shale gas production, and the potential risks shale gas developments and associated hydraulic fracturing may present to human health and the environment. More information on:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/integration/energy/unconventional_en.htm

In the meantime, we have initiated work to propose before the end of 2013 an adequate risk management framework for unconventional fossil fuels, in particular shale gas developments in

Europe. We are currently assessing what form such framework should take. See http://ec.europa.eu/atwork/pdf/forthcoming_cwp_initiatives_2013_en.pdf (item n°41).

Regarding requests that the Commission intervenes in order to stop shale gas activities, the Commission is not endowed with such competence. Nor can it decide on an EU-wide moratorium.