

## **Fracking doesn't taint drinking water, study says**

By Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, Friday, July 19, 2013

Pittsburgh -- A landmark federal study on hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, shows no evidence that chemicals from the natural gas drilling process contaminated drinking water aquifers at a western Pennsylvania drilling site, the Department of Energy said.

After a year of monitoring, the researchers found that the chemical-laced fluids used to free gas trapped deep below the surface stayed thousands of feet below the shallower areas that supply drinking water, geologist Richard Hammack said.

Although the results are preliminary - the study is still ongoing - they are the first independent look at whether the potentially toxic chemicals pose a threat to people during normal drilling operations.

Drilling fluids tagged with unique markers were injected more than 8,000 feet below the surface but were not detected in a monitoring zone at a depth of 5,000 feet. That means potentially dangerous substances stayed about a mile away from drinking water supplies, which are usually at depths of less than 500 feet.

"This is good news," said Duke University scientist Rob Jackson, who was not involved with the study. He called it a "useful and important approach" to monitoring fracking, but he cautioned that the single study doesn't prove that fracking can't pollute, since geology and industry practices vary widely across the nation.

The boom in gas drilling has led to tens of thousands of new wells being drilled in recent years. That's led to major economic benefits but also fears that the chemicals used in the drilling process could spread to water supplies.

The study done by the National Energy Technology Laboratory in Pittsburgh marked the first time that a drilling company let government scientists inject special tracers into the fracking fluid and then continue regular monitoring to see whether it spread toward drinking water sources.

"Very few people think that fracking at significant depths routinely leads to water contamination," said Scott Anderson, a drilling expert with the Environmental Defense Fund. "But the jury is still out on what the odds are that this might happen in special situations."