

MYTHS AND FACTS:

OIL AND GAS CONSTRUCTION SITE STORMWATER REGULATIONS



Photo by John Selkowitz, Courtesy of SkyTruth (<http://skytruth.org>)

An example of the large amount of dirt exposed on an oil and gas site, in the Upper Green River Valley in Wyoming.

The Energy Policy Act of 2005 contained an exemption from the Clean Water Act's stormwater runoff protections for construction activities related to oil and gas development. Construction activities cause erosion and significant sedimentation of streams, leading to pollution of drinking water, as well as harming aquatic habitat and fish populations. There is no reason to exempt oil and gas companies from these important pollution controls that other construction activities are required to follow.

MYTH:

Dirt and sediment are not pollutants.

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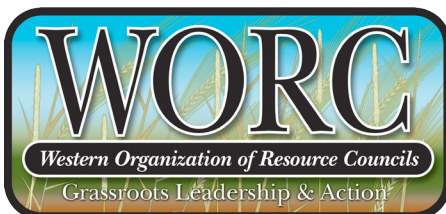
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FACT:

The Environmental Protection Agency rates sediment as the most common pollutant in rivers, streams, lakes and reservoirs. According to the EPA, accelerated erosion from human land use, like construction, accounts for 70 percent of the total sediment in the United States. Increased sediment can cause a number of problems, from filling up storm drains and catch basins, which increases the potential for flooding, to carrying nutrients that activate blue-green algae that release toxins and can make swimmers sick.

Sediment also is extremely dangerous to aquatic life. It disrupts the natural food chain by destroying the habitat where the smallest stream organisms live, causing declines in fish populations. Sediment can also clog fish gills, reducing resistance to disease, lowering growth rates, and affecting fish egg and larvae development.

According to the EPA, within the U.S., sediment pollution causes \$16 billion in environmental damage annually. In an effort to reduce sediment pollution and its costs, all construction activity is regulated except oil and gas construction.

Photo by Anonymous / Courtesy of esharon.blogspot.com



The close proximity of some oil and gas sites to water bodies poses great risk, such as this site in Texas, if no stormwater prevention is done.

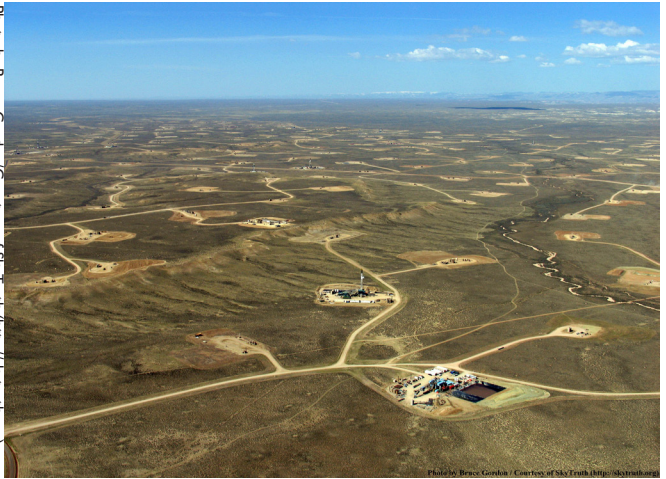
MYTH:

Any regulation of domestic oil and gas development inhibits our ability to decrease our reliance on foreign oil.

FACT:

At least five states currently have their own forms of stormwater permits and regulations. Two of these states, Wyoming and Colorado, have had stormwater regulations in place since 2006 and still continue to produce 60 percent of the nation's natural gas supply. The stormwater requirements have not slowed down the pace of oil and gas development in either of these states and there is absolutely no reason to believe it would do so anywhere else.

Photo by Bruce Gordon/Courtesy of SkyTruth (<http://skytruth.org>)



Even though one oil and gas site may be small compared to large commercial construction, they can be clustered, thus creating a large cumulative effect as in the Upper Green River Valley in Wyoming.

MYTH:

The stormwater regulations are flawed because they group areas with different rainfalls under one standard.

FACT:

The Clean Water Act's state primacy system gives states the flexibility to adopt flexible regulatory requirements that are suited to their unique climate and water conditions while meeting the law's benchmarks.

MYTH:

Oil and gas sites are located in rural areas and are already very clean compared to commercial and residential construction in urban settings.

FACT:

Construction sites in rural areas are no less prone to stormwater runoff pollution than construction sites in urban settings. While the specific types of pollutants may change with location, there will always be a pollution threat if no preventive measures are taken.

Photo by Anonymous / Courtesy of exlatron.blogspot.com



Notice the relative size of the oil and gas site at the bottom of the picture compared to the footprint of the houses in this Texas subdivision.

MYTH:

Requiring stormwater permits for oil and gas construction sites will force small oil and gas operators out of business.

FACT:

Stormwater regulations rely in large part on general permits and best management practices that are often times very simple and inexpensive, such as installing geotextiles or sediment traps, or grading and roughening soils. These temporary sediment control techniques would have little impact on profits, which are largely controlled by the demand for and price of oil and gas and drilling rigs.

MYTH:

Oil and gas construction sites are not the same as large residential or commercial construction sites.

FACT:

While it is true that each construction site is different and requires a unique combination of best management practices, the general effects of construction are the same. On almost all construction sites, including oil and gas construction sites, erosion is caused when vegetation is removed, exposing bare dirt and soil. The purpose of stormwater regulations and permits is to ensure that the damages of erosion are minimized.