

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 23, 2011

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: Kevin Dowling WORC staff, 406-671-1467 (cell) or 406-252-972

Landowners seek disclosure of chemicals used in oil and gas fields Group proposes *Coming Clean* principles for full disclosure

BILLINGS, MONT. – Residents in oil and gas fields across the country are reporting more health problems, air pollution, and water contamination, and one group is demanding strict disclosure of chemicals used in oil and gas development and stronger standards to prevent contamination.

Donald Nelson, a North Dakota rancher with Dakota Resource Council, a grassroots community organization, supported disclosure of chemicals during the Bureau of Land Management's forum on hydraulic fracturing Wednesday in Bismarck, N.D.

“With disclosure comes tracking,” Nelson said. “Then you can find out who caused the problem and who's going to fix it.” Oil wells have been on Nelson's land since the 1950s.

Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, is the high pressure injection of fluid, sand, and chemicals to crack open a rock or coal formation to increase oil and gas production. Although fracking chemicals have received most of the attention, Nelson said companies should disclose all chemicals used in each stage of oil and gas development.

In Bismarck, Nelson presented *Coming Clean*, nine criteria developed by the Western Organization of Resource Councils, a network of grassroots groups, to evaluate oil and gas chemical disclosure policies.

The criteria include disclosure of all chemicals used in exploring for and producing oil and gas, notification of landowners, and narrow exceptions for the protection of proprietary information. Some companies claim they would lose a competitive advantage by releasing exact chemical formulas of fracking mixtures.

In most instances, companies can keep secret the chemicals used in oil and gas development, including cancer-causing chemicals such as benzene.

“Without knowing what chemicals to look for, oil and gas field residents cannot conduct a thorough baseline water quality test or pinpoint causes of illnesses and pollution related to oil and gas activities.” said Lisa Bracken, a member of the Western Colorado Congress, an alliance for community action.

Following a massive blow-out in 2004, another natural gas seep occurred on Bracken's property in 2008. “It took two and half years for the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation

Commission to conduct sampling of gas bubbles coming up in the creek. When the seep was finally sampled, a suite of production gas compounds was detected. Yet, six months later, we still don't know what other compounds may be present. We know, whatever is there is enough to paralyze a frog found swimming in it.”

“Fracking fluids disclosure is the first step,” said John Fenton, a Pavillion, Wyo., rancher and board member of Powder River Basin Resource Council, a landowner’s group working on private property and conservation issues across Wyoming. “We also need state and federal regulation to ensure our water, air and health are protected. Disclosure of all fluids and better well construction and proper waste pit remediation are among other steps needed. Then, we need government inspection and enforcement of the rules.”

Fenton has a gas well 300 feet from his house and another 24 wells throughout his property. He said that in addition to serious drinking water contamination in the Pavillion area, the air often smells like hydrocarbons. “Some days it’s hard to breathe, and many of my family members and neighbors have serious illnesses,” he said. “Neighbors have lost their water wells, people have had to move out of their homes and our property has been devalued by 50 percent. Industry still isn’t required to tell us everything we’ve been exposed to, and after 10 years and all of this impact, state agencies are only now investigating how contamination has moved into our soils, water and air.”

BLM director Bob Abbey is considering requiring the disclosure of fracking chemicals on federal public land. BLM held a forum Friday in Little Rock, Ark., and conducts another session in Golden, Colo., April 25.

A copy of *Coming Clean* is available at www.worc.org.