New online database charts water quality regulations related to oil and gas development

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A searchable, comparative law database outlining water quality regulations for Colorado and other states experiencing shale oil and gas development is now available on LawAtlas.org.

The Oil & Gas - Water Quality database project is led by the University of Colorado Boulder's Intermountain Oil and Gas Best Management Practices (BMP) Project in partnership with Temple University's Public Health Law Research program and its LawAtlas.org website.

The newly launched Oil & Gas - Water Quality dataset (http://www.lawatlas.org/oilandgas) was created as a comparative tool for examining water quality laws and regulations related to oil and gas activities in Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, West Virginia and Wyoming.

The database allows policymakers, local governments, industry officials and citizens to study the scope of water quality law in their state or to make comparisons with other states. An interactive map allows for easy navigation across different jurisdictions, and downloadable PDFs are available that document each state's water quality regulations.

"Across the nation, local and state government jurisdictions are experiencing new or increased oil and gas development," said Matt Samelson, dataset creator, attorney and consultant for the CU-Boulder

Intermountain Oil and Gas BMP Project. "When development occurs in these jurisdictions, there is tremendous value in examining regulatory regimes already in effect in order to guide conversations about best regulatory practices."

Oil and gas production has increased nationwide as technological developments improved directional drilling and hydraulic fracturing practices, which involve pumping pressurized water, sand and chemicals deep down well bores to create fissures in the shale in order to free oil and natural gas.

In October, the U.S. Energy Information Administration predicted that the United States would surpass Russia and Saudi Arabia as the world's largest producer of oil and natural gas by the end of 2013.

"The development of oil and gas wells, particularly in urban and suburban areas, coupled with the practice of hydraulic fracturing has stimulated interest in laws designed to protect water quality," said Kathryn Mutz, director of CU-Boulder's Intermountain Oil and Gas BMP Project.

Because water quality regulations depend on the stage of development, the Oil & Gas - Water Quality database has been divided into five stages of oil and gas activities: Permitting, Design and Construction; Well Drilling; Well Completion; Production and Operation; and Reclamation.

Web users can select multiple queries and search by statute categories or by state. The water quality dataset contains nearly 100 distinct questions and corresponding regulations addressing oft-cited oil and gas development issues, such as public disclosure of chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing fluid; baseline water source testing; disposal of water in hydraulically fractured wells; and spill and accident reporting.