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Mapping PFAS “Forever Chemicals” in Oil & Gas Operations

Pittsburgh - FracTracker Alliance [released a new map](#) identifying the locations of over 1,200 oil and gas wells using toxic “forever chemicals” in Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Texas, and Wyoming.

The wells were identified in a [report that Physicians for Social Responsibility \(PSR\)](#), with assistance from FracTracker Alliance, released on Monday. The report presents evidence that oil and gas companies including ExxonMobil and Chevron have used per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), and/or substances that can degrade into PFAS, in hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) for oil and gas in more than 1,200 wells in six U.S. states between 2012 and 2020. PFAS have been linked to cancer, birth defects, pre-eclampsia, and other serious health effects. They are toxic in minuscule concentrations, accumulate inside the human body, and do not break down in the environment.

The FracTracker Alliance map includes a wealth of demographic data about the populations living near wells fracked with PFAS and/or PFAS precursors. Readers can identify levels of cancer risk per census block and sites where wells using PFAS chemicals and their precursors drill through aquifers.

The data suggest that PFAS use in fracking imposes disproportionate impacts on populations of people of color, low-income communities, and those living in tribal regions, raising concerns about environmental justice.

The map shows over 50 of these wells are located in five tribal regions of the Oklahoma Tribal Statistical Areas (OTSA), where tribal governments retain significant authority. The majority of the wells identified in the PSR report are located in Texas.

The census blocks with PFAS wells are 32% non-white. As a point of comparison, the population of Texas, the state with the highest concentration of PFAS wells, is 21% nonwhite, according to the US Census Bureau.

"It's critical that the public have access to information about potential exposure to toxic chemicals that put their health at risk," said Barbara Gottlieb, PSR's Environment & Health Program Director. "Visualizing the locations of oil and gas sites that have used PFAS and/or PFAS precursors helps communities know what dangers they're facing and take actions to protect themselves."

A decade ago, the US Environmental Protection Agency approved several chemicals for use in oil and gas operations, despite voicing serious misgivings over their toxicity and the potential that the chemicals could degrade into PFAS. The health effects of these chemicals remain difficult to assess, in part due to the secrecy that shrouds their precise identity.



The lack of full disclosure of chemicals used in oil and gas operations raises the potential that PFAS could have been used even more extensively than records indicate, whether geographically, in other extraction techniques such as waterflooding, or in other stages of the oil and gas extraction process, such as drilling, that precede the underground injections known as fracking.

"It's troubling to see the locations of oil and gas wells in which evidence shows companies used toxic PFAS or PFAS precursors," said report author Dusty Horwitt. "FracTracker Alliance's map increases the urgency for federal and state officials to determine the extent of PFAS use in oil and gas extraction and to ensure that people are protected."

"Here we see evidence of an industry choosing to use toxic chemicals that persist for decades - both in the environment and human body - in nearly 1,500 wells across the country that we know of," said Matt Kelso, FracTracker Manager of Data & Technology. "What's more, federal regulators were aware of the risk but let it happen anyway. It's time for oversight that protects health and the environment rather than corporate profits."

Find the map at:

<https://www.fractracker.org/2021/07/mapping-pfas-forever-chemicals-in-oil-gas-operations/>

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Contact

Shannon Smith, Manager of Communications & Development, FracTracker Alliance,
(412) 212-7436, smith@fractracker.org