

Drilling Waste Wins EPA Reprieve

Bob Vandewater • Published: July 5, 1988

Oklahoma oil and gas drilling and production industry officials are breathing easier after the Environmental Protection Agency's announcement last week that it will not regulate drilling wastes and produced waters as hazardous materials.

But W. Timothy Dowd, executive director of the Oklahoma City-based Interstate Oil Compact Commission, said drillers and producers should not get too relaxed because the issue could be revived.

He said he expects congressional oversight on the question of whether current practices for disposing of oil-field drilling muds and produced waters are adequate to protect the environment.

Moreover, the EPA could review the whole regulation issue under some future presidential administration, Dowd said.

"Somebody will be up there (in Washington) second-guessing (the EPA's decision) all along the line," he said.

Environmental groups like the Sierra Club and others already have sharply criticized the EPA announcement.

One Sierra Club spokesman said the EPA "again is favoring big oil and big business and shunting its responsibility to protect the public health and the environment."

But the EPA said in lieu of putting drilling wastes under hazardous material regulations, it will get tougher on states that fail to enforce existing laws governing disposal of these substances.

"I think the states by and large do a good job" of regulating disposal of drilling wastes," Dowd said.

But, because the federal regulation issue could be revived and EPA plans to watchdog states' enforcement of their own rules, states will "have to do a better job of documenting what they're doing," he said.

Mike Battles, director of the pollution abatement department within the Oklahoma Corporation Commission, said the threat of stiffer EPA regulation of drilling wastes is not over.

He said he believes Oklahoma regulation of those wastes is good but that efforts to improve and rewrite specific have been stepped up in the past year.

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