

Air quality a concern in big gas fields

Funds sought for monitoring program

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**JONAH FIELD AND
PINEDALE ANTICLINE**

Gov. Dave Freudenthal wants the state Department of Environmental Quality's new budget to include extra money to start an air quality monitoring program in southwest Wyoming where major natural gas development is underway, according to the governor's press secretary Lara Azar.

The exact cost wasn't immediately available. However, one monitoring station could cost as much as \$180,000, according to Dan Olson, administrator of the State Department of

Environmental Quality's Air Quality Division.

Olson said he wants to target the Jonah and Pinedale Anticline natural gas fields in particular.

"I've been concerned for some time about the fact that there is development going on there where we don't have a lot of information on what the real air quality is," Olson said in a recent interview.

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QUALITY: Funding sought for monitoring

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Air quality has become a focus of concern as drilling activity continues to intensify in the area. Recently, an in-house Bureau of Land Management e-mail was leaked to the public that contained speculation about whether proposals for full-scale development would degrade air quality enough that the public would have to be kept off the mostly federal land.

Officials at the BLM Pinedale Field Office said the discussion was purely speculation, and they made assurances that the agency wouldn't allow such a scenario to happen.

Olson said the public doesn't really know what effect the development will have on air quality, and establishing a comprehensive monitoring program would provide the answers the public deserves.

"We are proceeding from the basis that we don't really have a lot of understanding of what the real impact is because we don't have monitoring there," Olson said.

So far, air quality impacts are being measured by using computer modeling, which is a best guess, Olson added.

Steve Reynolds, spokesman for EnCana Oil & Gas USA Inc., said his company shares the DEQ's desire to have good, science-based information on the actual air quality when considering future development scenarios in the area.

"You have to look at the area holistically with a number of different sites to understand the total dynamics," Reynolds said. "EnCana would support having that kind of information."

The Jonah and Pinedale

Anticline area is the second largest natural gas producing region in the state. EnCana is currently proposing to grow their program from 497 wells to 1,250 wells. The company would like to ultimately drill 2,000 wells in the Jonah field.

The largest source of air pollutants related the development are expected to come from compressor stations that use a series of large engines to pump the gas through pipeline gathering systems. BLM and DEQ officials are currently considering the impacts of nitrogen oxide and sulfur dioxide in particular.

Reynolds said EnCana currently has a health and safety program to protect its employees from benzene, but so far the monitoring has not picked up any traces of the gas where the employees work.