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Studies confirm industry chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing pose little risk

Studies from the CSIRO and the National Industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme (NICNAS) have confirmed that the use of chemicals in the coal seam gas (CSG) industry poses little risk to the community or the environment.

In five technical papers released today, the CSIRO found that residual chemicals remaining underground after hydraulic fracturing are unlikely to reach people or ecosystems in concentrations that would cause concern and therefore risks are very low.

“The CSIRO studies are just the latest independent research which should reassure people that, properly regulated, hydraulic fracturing is safe,” said APPEA Chief Executive Dr Malcolm Roberts.

Further work by NICNAS as part of the *National assessment of chemicals associated with coal seam gas extraction in Australia* examined the risks to health and the environment from surface (above-ground) chemical spills.

The NICNAS assessment focuses on what it describes as “worst-case” scenarios that are highly-implausible and assume that none of the safety and handling precautions required by law are used.

For example, one scenario effectively assumes workers handling chemicals do not wear any protective equipment. Another scenario examines the health effects of bathing every day, for a year, in water contaminated by a major transport chemical spill that is unnoticed, unreported and not cleaned up.

“These NICNAS scenarios assume that none of the safety and handling precautions required by law and good industry practice to protect people and the environment are applied,” Dr Roberts said.

“The NICNAS assessment found the most significant potential risk to public health and the environment was exposure to chemicals after a large-scale transport spill, a risk facing any industry that uses chemicals.

“The chemicals used for hydraulic fracturing in the CSG industry accounts for less than one hundredth of one per cent of chemicals transported by road in Australia. Extensive regulation of heavy vehicle movements and chemical storage already minimises the risks identified.

“Australia’s natural gas industry provided data to the NICNAS assessment and will consider its findings. However, it should be noted that some 80 per cent of the 40,000 chemicals approved for use across all Australian industries are yet to be assessed by NICNAS in the same way.”

See the following links for more details on the regulation of [CSG chemical transportation](#) and industry practices for ensuring [safe management of fracking flowback water](#).

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