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Colorado's Oil and Gas Infrastructure Drowning in Climate-Driven Floodwaters

Fossil fuel industry not immune to the climate-driven disaster it helps create

- Jon Queally, staff writer



A gas drilling facility underwater in Colorado. (Photo: East Boulder County United) According to reports, massive flooding across Colorado over the last week is wreaking havoc with the state's oil and gas infrastructure as cresting rivers and heavy rainfall submerged drilling and storage facilities, allowing the release of fuel and toxic chemicals.

The human toll of the floods—as well as widespread damage to roads, bridges, and communities—has dominated headlines, but as *Grist's* John Upton has documented, the impact on the state's fracking and oil infrastructure has gone widely ignored by media outlets.

As Upton [reports](#):

Fracking infrastructure has been inundated and its toxic contents have spilled out. Pipelines that transport fossil fuels are sagging and snapping under pressure. Tanks that store chemicals and polluted water are being overwhelmed and toppling over. Oil and gas wells are flooding.

The industry has shut down operations in all of the major flood zones, but they say making accurate assessments about the extent of the damage, or the kinds of chemicals that may have been released will be impossible until the waters fall and proper inspections can be done.

[According](#) to the *Denver Business Journal*:

Once the floodwaters recede, state regulators and the energy companies are expected to tackle the question of environmental contamination from the flood as well as remediation, Mike King, the executive director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, said Monday.

“The events of the last four or five days have been very astounding and the ramifications, the loss of life and property across Colorado, is staggering,” King said.

“This is not going to be fixed overnight and the impacts and ramifications will linger for a long time,” he said.

But as Gary Wockner, director of the Clean Water Action and Clean Water Fund in Colorado, told *The Coloradoan*, the delay is a key part of the problem. The industry, with so much of its drilling operations occurring within designated floodplains, has no way to prevent these disasters from occurring. Wockner, [according](#) to the newspaper, "would like to see new floodplain regulations passed restricting oil and gas development in floodplains — namely, pushing oil and gas development farther from the banks" of vital rivers and streams. Beyond that, he would like the gas industry to disclose the contents of the fracking chemicals they use and demands better emergency measures in the event of future disasters.

The damage to the fossil fuel industry across the state strikes a terrifying irony for those [commenting on the relationship between global warming](#) and the kind of flooding Colorado is seeing. With climate change experts saying the flood is a 500- or thousand-year event, they point out that the industry is not immune from the destruction its activities help generate.

As Upton writes:

Might the fracking industry have worsened Colorado’s floods by contributing to climate change, then spilled its toxic chemicals into those floodwaters? That would be a cruel double-punch.