



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

We conducted this review in response to a congressional request. We evaluated the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Region 6 issuance and withdrawal of an emergency order under Section 1431 of the Safe Drinking Water Act to the Range Resources Gas Drilling Company, to determine whether the EPA followed applicable laws and policy.

Region 6 concluded that a gas well owned and operated by Range Resources in Parker County, Texas, either caused or contributed to contamination found in the groundwater. Subsequently, on December 7, 2010, Region 6 issued an emergency order instructing Range Resources to investigate the groundwater and soil in the contaminated area to determine the cause of the contamination and to take actions to remediate and prevent further contamination.

This report addresses the following EPA themes:

- *Making a visible difference in communities across the country.*
- *Taking action on toxics and chemical safety.*
- *Protecting water: A precious limited resource.*

For further information, contact our public affairs office at (202) 566-2391.

The full report is at:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2014/20131220-14-P-0044.pdf

Response to Congressional Inquiry Regarding the EPA's Emergency Order to the Range Resources Gas Drilling Company

What We Found

Region 6's issuance of the emergency order to Range Resources under Section 1431 of the Safe Drinking Water Act, and the region's subsequent enforcement actions, conformed to agency guidelines, regulations and policy. The region's interactions with state officials and other stakeholders were appropriate and within Section 1431 guidelines.

The EPA withdrew its emergency order regarding Range Resources hydraulic fracturing operations, but continues to monitor the situation for evidence of widespread contamination.

Laws and guidance do not address withdrawing Section 1431 emergency orders and the EPA used its discretion in withdrawing the emergency order. The EPA reached an agreement whereby Range Resources agreed to test 20 water wells every 3 months for a year to provide information about the presence of more widespread contamination. According to the EPA, the sampling that Range Resources has completed indicates no widespread methane contamination of concern in the wells that were sampled in Parker County. However, the EPA lacks quality assurance information for the Range Resources' sampling program, and questions remain about the contamination.

Recommendations and Planned Corrective Actions

We recommend that the Region 6 Regional Administrator (1) collect and evaluate the testing results being provided by Range Resources to determine whether the data is of sufficient quality and utility, (2) determine whether an imminent and substantial endangerment still exists at the original residential well involved, (3) inform the affected residents of the present status of the contamination and of any Region 6 planned actions, (4) work with the Railroad Commission of Texas to ensure appropriate action is taken as needed, and (5) document the costs and resources invested to complete the work included in these recommendations.

In its official comments and in subsequent meetings, the EPA agreed with and provided corrective actions that address our recommendations. All recommendations are resolved with corrective actions underway. No final response to this report is required.