



After a series of high-profile natural gas drilling spills, the Energy Department named a panel to recommend ways to improve the safety of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, a technique that has expanded the country's potential to extract the fuel.

President Barack Obama asked the DOE to form the panel of academic and environmental experts to identify any immediate steps that can be taken to improve the safety and environmental performance of fracking, the DOE said on Thursday.

The panel, which includes John Deutch, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Daniel Yergin, the chairman of IHS Cambridge Energy Research Associates, will report those steps within 90 days of beginning their work.

Within six months they will also develop advice for the government on practices for shale extraction to ensure public health and the environment.

"America's vast natural gas resources can generate many new jobs and provide significant environmental benefits, but we need to ensure we harness these resources safely," DOE Secretary Steven Chu said in a release.

In fracking, drillers unlock trapped natural gas by cracking rocks deep underground with blasts of mixed water, sand and chemicals.

Drillers say fracking has opened up vast new supplies of natural gas that will reduce imports of the fuel. Backers also say it could reduce oil imports in the future, if vehicles are converted to run on natural gas.

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