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Abstract

The effective evaluation and management of environmental risks can dramatically reduce the costs and headaches associated with the development of Coal Bed Methane resources in the Rocky Mountains. The adverse effects of coal bed methane development are generally overestimated and result in costly settlement payment by operators when naturally occurring conditions are misunderstood as being caused by resource development. Work in the San Juan, Raton, and Powder River basins reveals a significant presence of naturally occurring methane in seeps, soil gas and well water. It also indicates that non-impacted domestic well waters frequently contain a wide variety of contaminants, at levels that violate EPA drinking water limits. A targeted environmental risk evaluation can quickly and inexpensively identify these conditions and provide a baseline for managing the risks of subsequent development. The paper will identify the key environmental indicators, cost-effective methods of acquiring data, and illustrate how the proper interpretation of data can prevent litigation and post-development issues with landowners and regulators.