

Operations at Preston New Road

Keeping you informed

Update 11
24 October 2019

As the regulators of the shale gas industry we are committed to keeping local people updated on our work at the Preston New Road site over the coming months.

Site operations

In late September Cuadrilla announced that it intended to remove hydraulic fracturing equipment from the site. Since that time Cuadrilla has been preparing the site for extended well tests. This phase of operations does not involve hydraulic fracturing.

In advance of the well testing phase, Cuadrilla has started to flow back fluid from the well as part of well clean-up operations. This process results in a variable flow of gas to the surface. The returning gas is combusted in the flare, as allowed under the Environment Agency (EA) permit.

Due to the variable flow of gas during this phase of operations Cuadrilla has added propane as a supplement to support combustion of natural gas in the flare. This has led to black smoke being generated on a few occasions.

In response to reports of black smoke and visible flames from the top of the flare, the Environment Agency attended the area on Saturday 12 October and carried out a planned audit on Thursday 17 October 2019.

The work to review the information from the audit is still ongoing. Once complete, the Environment Agency will publish the results of its audit on Citizen Space.



The two flares at the Preston New Road site

Assessment of seismic data

Following the seismic events at the Preston New Road site, including a 2.9ML event on 26 August 2019, the Oil and Gas Authority (OGA) suspended operations and requested additional data and analysis from Cuadrilla.

The OGA has received initial data from Cuadrilla which still requires further consideration.

Keeping you informed

Please visit our Citizen Space page to see the latest information from audits, site inspections and operator reports

<https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/onshore-oil-and-gas/information-on-cuadrillas-preston-new-road-site>

Groundwater Data

In September, following an in depth audit, the EA issued Cuadrilla with a warning for failing to comply with the required conditions for the control and monitoring of emissions. This involved collecting an incomplete data set for groundwater analyses, failing to notify us of the missing data and inadequate communication and training of contractors on sampling requirements.

The breaches were classed as Category 4 (with minimal or no environmental impact). Further details are on our Citizen Space webpage.

Surface water

Heavy rainfall on the weekend of 28 September led to pooling of water in the fields surrounding the site. This is as a result of the area being at a natural low point. The water is surface water that has drained from the fields and not from the site

EA staff carried out site inspections on 30 September and most recently on the 17 October. Staff did not detect any breach in the containment of surface water on site. We are satisfied that Cuadrilla appropriately managed surface water on site, correctly holding it in tanks and bunds, before tankering it off site.



Change to the environmental permit

The Environment Agency has today (24/10/19) approved a change to Cuadrilla's environmental permit. The change allows for a process known as a 'nitrogen lift' to take place for a limited number of days during the next phase of well testing operations. This short term activity uses nitrogen to assist with the removal of fluids in the well in order to allow gas to flow to the surface. It may result in venting of gas for short periods before the flare ignites. This is a safe and commonly practiced technique in the oil and gas industry.

The decision follows rigorous technical assessment and modelling of the impact to the environment and people. The changes we have agreed place strict requirements on Cuadrilla so that the period where gas may be vented will be limited and the flaring of gas controlled. We have included a requirement on Cuadrilla to carry out continuous video monitoring of the flares while gas is being flowed to them.

The levels of methane expected to be vented will have minimal environmental impact and do not represent a risk of harm to people. Our inspectors will carry out checks to ensure that operations are carried out in line with the controls set out in the permit and the gas management plan.

Contacting us

Environment Agency 24 Hour hotline number 0800 80 70 60

or PNREnquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

Health and Safety Executive at www.hse.gov.uk/contact/concerns.htm

The Oil & Gas Authority at oga.correspondence@ogauthority.co.uk

Shale Environmental Regulator Group at SERG@environment-agency.gov.uk