

Marcellus Round-Up

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“Marcellus Round-up” is a review of news in the Marcellus shale region gleaned from government and industry press releases and wire and media reports.

Although a preliminary draft of the revised Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement (SGEIS) on high-volume horizontal hydraulic fracturing was released in July, DEC still has not published their official revised draft. DEC Commissioner Joe Martens was quoted on the radio as saying that DEC was “considering” public hearings, and that the SGEIS would be out by late summer. Meanwhile, the DEC’s new hydrofracking advisory committee held their first meeting in secret (they are not subject to the state’s Open Meeting Laws) and Robert Williams, who sits on the Joint Landowners Coalition board of directors, has been appointed to the committee.

A reminder for those preparing comments on the SGEIS – make sure you wait until the official comment period opens before submitting your comments. Otherwise they will be disregarded.

Health Issues in Drill Zone

Pennsylvania state representative Mike Sturla made the news last week when he sent an email to a reporter noting that Marcellus shale oil workers were spreading STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) in the communities where they worked. He based his comments on a report from the Troy Community Hospital. A spokesperson from the Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health at Penn State University disputes the finding. However, the report from the Troy hospital paints an interesting portrait of the stresses of drilling-driven boomtown impacts on a local health care system. Here are some of the items they note:

- An increase in outpatient volume, with many patients from a migratory population;
- An increase in requests for pre-hire, accident follow up, and sobriety monitoring;
- An increase in industry related injuries and exposures, and increased use of decontamination showers to rinse patients covered in frack fluid prior to treatment;
- Increased motor vehicle accidents;
- Delayed access to the hospital for patients and emergency vehicles (“Patient transport and response to emergency calls are delayed and hampered requiring adjustments to timing of treatments and planning for increased delays”);
- Significant increase in number of calls for EMS services;
- Call volumes for EMS services have significantly increased;
- An increase in sexually transmitted diseases;
- An increase in drug use and specifically “bath salts”.

You can read the complete report at <http://stateimpact.npr.org/pennsylvania/2011/08/17/troy-community-hospitals-report/>

Pipeline Problems

Pipeline spills and defects continue to plague the northeast. At the beginning of the month Laser Northeast Gathering Co. LLC experienced three spills of drilling mud. More than a thousand gallons of the mud, composed of bentonite clay, spilled into Laurel Lake Creek, a “high value” waterway according to the PA Department of Environmental Protection. The spills happened as the company was drilling beneath the creek for pipeline placement. Both the DEP and the company are monitoring the site.

The 33-mile long pipeline will transport natural gas from northern Susquehanna County (where the spills happened) to the Millennium interstate pipeline. The Millennium pipeline has its own problems. Earlier this year one of the welds had to be repaired, and last month, after a six-month

investigation, federal pipeline regulators declared the pipeline has defective welds that could pose a public safety risk if they are not corrected.

Water Issues

Due to low water in July, the Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) suspended water withdrawals in PA. At the same time, Painted Post officials were negotiating with Shell Oil to sell village water for use in Pennsylvania gas drilling operations – an action that could bring in more than \$2 annually to the village coffers. They plan to ship water by rail from a depot and filling station that would be built at the former Ingersoll-Rand foundry site. According to media reports, the village already has permission from the SRBC to withdraw up to a million gallons of water a day from the municipal water system. The village hopes to complete negotiations by the end of the month; no updates as of press time.

Funding Drilling Accidents

Earlier this month NY State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli proposed a bill that would create an industry-funded reserve to cover the cost of damages from any future gas-drilling accidents. The money would come from a surcharge on permit fees for well pads and other production facilities. Money from the fund would cover the cost of cleaning up accidents in cases where contamination can't be immediately identified, or when the responsible party refuses to pay. The state would later determine who is responsible and sue to recover the costs.

The natural gas industry and business groups are pushing back against the proposal. In a statement to the press, IOGA Executive Director Brad Gill called the bill premature. “The proposal does not take into account existing permit requirements, which address bonding for site reclamation, and it does not acknowledge existing environmental, criminal and civil law, which holds businesses accountable on many levels,” he said.

The DEC hasn't yet taken a position on the bill. But last month the agency established a hydro-fracking advisory panel to make recommendations on permit fees, severance taxes and similar issues.

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