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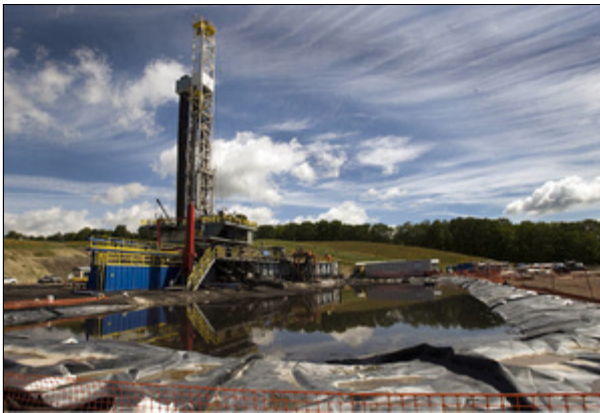
NATURAL GAS EXPLORATION

July 25

Gas drillers finding eco-friendliness best

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Staff Writer

DIMOCK TWP. – Cabot Oil and Gas took a major public relations hit after state regulators fined the company for allowing natural gas from its wells to contaminate drinking water wells in a village in Susquehanna County.



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A Cabot well is drilled in Susquehanna County as part of the company's work in the Marcellus Shale. Stung by earlier pollution problems when area water became contaminated, the company is taking a new tack as it taps into natural gas throughout the region.

DON CAREY/THE TIMES LEADER



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Grit is deposited in a holding pond as a Cabot well is drilled in Susquehanna County. Once the

drilling is done, the process of extracting natural gas from the Marcellus Shale can begin.

DON CAREY photos/THE TIMES LEADER

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But a visit to a drilling rig near the same village last week revealed a company that is making efforts to protect the environment, reclaim land and rebuild public roads that have been neglected for decades.

Leading the tour along with George Stark, Cabot's director of external affairs, was Cabot drilling supervisor Jerry Dugas, who is proud to call himself a resident of the commonwealth.

"I've been here with Cabot now for over a year," said Dugas, 57, of Tunkhannock.

"I moved from Houston, Texas, originally from south Louisiana. I liquidated everything I had back there and I'm a resident of the fine state of Pennsylvania, registered to vote and I pay my taxes. So I'm not a transient, I'm here for the long haul," Dugas said.

Stark said Cabot would like to hire more local people. The company is working with Lackawanna College, where a two-year degree is offered in completion, production and compression technologies, as well as with the Susquehanna County Career and Technology Center to get a trained work force.

"This is a skill set that we don't find in Susquehanna County that you can just go to schools and hire for this," Stark said.

Dugas showed visitors the Flex 4 rig, which was set up on the J. Blaisure well pad about two months ago. He called it "the Cadillac" of drilling rigs.

"The main advantage you have with these rigs right here, you see those rails along the bottom, this particular unit right here can actually slide 80 feet one way and 10 feet left or right without dismantling the whole thing. These rigs are designed to drill multiple wells without tearing the rig all apart and getting cranes out here," Dugas said.

Cabot plans to drill six natural gas wells on the pad.

"The intent is to try to have as many wells on one pad as (economically feasible). Every time you have to move a rig, it costs a tremendous amount of money, because it's not just the cost to move the rig, it's building these things," Dugas said, referring to the pad itself and the berm surrounding it.

A hillside had to be dug out to make it level, and erosion and sediment control plans had to be implemented.

"So we're trying to minimize it and we're trying to get to drill more wells on one pad, especially in preparation for the wintertime and the spring break-up. We try to minimize moving this equipment during that time because we try to protect the roads," he said.

Drilling more wells on one pad also minimizes the company's environmental footprint, Stark said.

Cabot currently has seven rigs operating in Susquehanna County.

The fully automated rig means a safer work environment, Dugas said, his voice rising above noise from three generators supplying electricity for rig operations and the hissing of compressed air released every few minutes.

"A drilling rig is a dangerous place to work. Anything is manageable, but the closer people are to steel that moves, the risk goes up that you can get hurt. So the industry has constantly tried to automate all of the steps in the process of whatever we do to try to keep the human being as far away from that moving steel as possible through automation and hydraulics. That's what lowers the frequency of incidents," Dugas said.

Because the equipment uses hydraulics, even following a maintenance schedule there's still a chance that a leak could occur.

"We had to come up with another way to try to do this thing in a manner that would not impact the environment. So basically what we did to turn this thing around for Cabot, we took a zero attitude towards spills. And this is going above and beyond regulations," Dugas said.

"As the drilling department, we have taken the theme that we will put nothing on this ground that was not native to what was here before we got here. So the only thing that can touch this ground is two things – rainwater and snow. Anything else would be foreign," he said.

The company started by laying 40-mil thick plastic around the base of the drill rig.

"If equipment would spring a leak anywhere, it would first fall on the plastic and it would give us time to mobilize equipment we need to pick up whatever the spill was. But the spill would be isolated from the virgin ground. Then, what we started learning is that when we started out with this, it was a good idea. But you can't tell how far something is going to go when a spill happens that's under pressure," Dugas said.

Cabot extended the coverage of the plastic and berm to the point where "the odds of the spill reaching (off the plastic) are slim to none," he said.

Behind the rig is a pit to catch the crushed rock and drill filings that are brought back up from the well bore in water-based drilling fluid.

Dugas showed various parts of the rig, such as a pipe handling system that eliminates the need for workers to manually screw together 30-foot-long drilling pipes, and a blowout protector, the type of equipment that failed in the Gulf of Mexico, causing the massive oil leak a few months ago.

"This is our safety protection. If you have an unexpected flow of pressure, you can close the well. So this is something that everyone respects. And you have redundant systems for everything that's on here," Dugas said of the blowout protector.

On the upper level of the rig is the driller shack, where the driller monitors the depth of drilling, temperatures and hydraulic pressures. He also has control over the blowout preventer, Dugas

said.

Cabot had drilled nearly 2,500 feet deep as of noon Thursday, getting closer to the completion of drilling the third well on the pad. The crew will drill to a depth of about 6,000 feet and then drill a horizontal stretch about 3,000 feet.

After the drilling of the six wells is complete, the drilling crew will move to a new site, and the hydraulic fracturing crew will come onsite to begin completion operations, Stark said.

After showing visitors around the drill rig, Stark drove them to a completed well site on farmland a few miles away.

“We’re on an existing farmer’s field. We will work with him on replanting, whether he wants to replant it himself or if he wants us to replant it. When it’s all said and done, this is what you’re left with – a well head producing natural gas, tanks behind it catching brine water,” and two small monitoring boxes, Stark said.

Stark also showed a road – Route 2015 off Hop Bottom Road – that Cabot hired contractors to rebuild so its trucks could safely pass each other on it.

The contractors are widening the road and laying down a new 14-inch base.

Stark said Cabot will spend about \$5 million to rebuild municipal roads in the county. The company’s investment in the county has been significant since it began drilling there in 2006, he said.

Cabot drilled an exploratory well in Susquehanna County in 2006, drilled two wells the following year and 20 more in 2007. Last year, the company drilled 40 more wells, having invested \$500 million in the county to that point.

Cabot budgeted \$400 million in spending this year with a plan to drill a total of 90 more wells in 2010.

The company also paid out \$11 million in royalties to Susquehanna County land owners in 2009, Stark said.

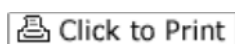
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