

The Daily Star, Oneonta, NY - otsego county news, delaware county news, oneonta news, oneonta sports

April 29, 2010

Drilling rules should be same in all parts of New York

Daily Star

So, how does it feel to be a second-class citizen?

Less than a week ago, the state Department of Environmental Conservation announced a "de facto ban" on drilling for natural gas in the New York City and Syracuse watershed areas.

The action means that applications to drill for shale gas in those two regions will be considered on a case-by-case basis instead of the rules applying to the rest of the state.

Whether residents of Otsego and Delaware counties are for or against drilling, there's one thing about this ruling that shouts out at us.

The health and safety of people in New York City and Syracuse are more important than ours.

Rep. Michael Arcuri, D-Utica, is rightfully "outraged by the DEC's decision ... for what appears to be no better reason than to protect wealthy landowners and New York City residents," he said in a media statement.

"If it's not safe enough for New York City, why is it safe for Cortland, Ithaca or Oneonta?" he said. "All New Yorkers deserve equal protection from potential risks."

The New York City watershed covers almost 2,000 square miles, including about 60 square miles _ or 8 percent _ of the Marcellus Shale region, which is said to be rich in natural gas.

What worries environmentalists is the process of getting to the gas that is trapped in the shale formations.

It's called "fracking," and it involves a high-pressure cocktail of water, sand and a bunch of chemicals that the drilling folks say are safe, and others say can and will pollute the water we drink.

Whether the fracking process is safe is the subject for another day. What concerns us today is that the unfairness of the ruling.

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg doesn't have any problem with it, though.

"Portions of the Marcellus Shale where the city's watershed lies must be treated differently, and the Department of Environmental Conservation's decision today recognizes that crucial fact," Bloomberg said Friday.

Of course, Bloomberg doesn't live in Upstate New York, but Assembly member Kevin Cahill of Kingston does.

"There is no reason to be more protective of the drinking water of a child in New York City than there is to be protective of the drinking water for somebody who doesn't happen to live in the New York City watershed," Cahill said. "One standard would work. If it's not safe for the watershed, it ought not be considered safe for the rest of the state."

Fair is fair, and the DEC ruling is anything but fair. What it is, is an outrage, and must be revisited and changed.