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## 8,000 People? E.P.A. Defers Hearing on Fracking

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Jeff Swensen for The New York Times The E.P.A.'s last hearing on fracking, held in Canonsburg, Pa., in July, drew over 1,200 people.

After successfully holding hearings around the country on the impact of the natural gas drilling method known as hydraulic fracturing, officials with the federal Environmental Protection Agency ran into a hurdle this week in New York State: finding an acceptable site for a hearing and for the passionate crowds expected to show up for it.

The agency announced on Tuesday that it was canceling an all-day hearing that had been scheduled for Thursday at the [OnCenter Complex](#) Convention Center in Syracuse after Onondaga County officials expressed concern that they had not been given enough time to prepare security in anticipation of rallies and protests at the event.

The hearing had just been moved to Syracuse after the original venue, Binghamton University, set conditions that E.P.A. officials found unacceptable and sent the agency looking for an alternate site in a hurry.

Judith Enck, the E.P.A.'s regional administrator in New York, said that Binghamton University had been squared away as a site last month but suddenly decided to change the meeting's location to a room with no air conditioning. When the E.P.A. "pushed back" on this change, she said, the university relented but raised its fee for the event — to \$32,000 from \$6,000.

"It is regretful that Binghamton University has put E.P.A., and more importantly, thousands of people on both sides of the issue who had planned to attend this meeting, in this inconvenient and difficult position," Ms. Enck said in a statement. "Universities are places where civic participation should flourish, especially on a major environmental topic like hydraulic fracturing's potential impact on drinking water."

But university officials countered that they had raised the price to cover security and logistical costs after consulting local law enforcement officials, special interest groups and others that indicated that as many as 8,000 people could show up for the hearing, far more than the 1,200 participants that the E.P.A. had pre-registered for the event.

"Because we are a public university and responsible to the taxpayer, and as we do for all contracted events, a price was developed to ensure that the campus would remain cost-neutral," the university's interim president, C. Peter Magrath, and its vice president for

administration, James Van Voorst, said in a joint statement.

The E.P.A. is now hunting for a new site and hopes to hold the hearing in September.

Hydraulic is a type of natural gas exploration that involves injecting millions of gallons of chemically treated water deep into the ground.

The cancellation disappointed many of the people whose planned attendance had stirred some concern for the host venues. Roger Downs, the Sierra Club's senior staff member in New York, said that environmental and grass-roots groups had planned to bus people from around the state to the hearing to hold a rally.

He said the rally was intended to signal concern over drilling but also support for the E.P.A., which is soliciting testimony for a study on the potential impact of hydraulic fracturing on drinking water.

"I really doubt it would have been that big a deal in either site," he said.