

# PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

## Gas driller polluted Susquehanna water wells, suit claims

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Some Susquehanna County families claim fracking fluids from a Texas company's Marcellus shale drilling operation contaminated their wells with hazardous chemicals.

In a lawsuit filed recently in Susquehanna County Common Pleas Court, the families allege Southwestern Energy Production Co. of Houston failed to properly encase a gas well near the homes and, as a result, hazardous chemicals including barium, strontium and manganese seeped into residential water wells.

The case is one of several filed in state and federal courts across Pennsylvania, claiming drillers in the gas rich Marcellus shale have fouled water wells. Susquehanna County is about a five-hour drive northeast of Pittsburgh.

Southwestern Energy did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

Drillers tap into the Marcellus shale about a mile beneath the surface. They shoot as much as five million gallons of water, sand and chemicals into the well at high pressure to release the gas from the rocks.

Attorney Peter Cambs, who represents 13 families in the Susquehanna County case, said his clients noticed their well water filled with silt shortly after Southwestern Energy began drilling its Price No. 1 well in April 2008.

He said the state Department of Environmental Protection's test of the wells revealed high levels of barium, strontium and manganese.

"All the experts we've consulted with said there is no other explanation to that naturally occurring other than drilling," Cambs said.

The families have been forced to pay for alternate water supplies, have experienced a decline in property values and fear for their health, the lawyer said.

John Repetz, a spokesman for the DEP, declined to comment on the case.

"The Pennsylvania Clean Streams Act says it is illegal to impact and pollute the waters of the commonwealth. If the charge is that fracking contaminated wells, we have yet to see if happen. If someone shows us that it happens, then

we are obligated to shut down the operation," Repetz said.

Kathryn Klaber, president of the Cecil-based Marcellus Shale Coalition, said the industry fears it may be taking the rap for problems it did not create.

"I think one of the big concerns here is a lack of acknowledgement that serious, private water-well problems existed in Pennsylvania well before anyone knew what the word Marcellus meant," she said.

"We are checking private water wells now more than ever before, and we're coming up with troubling results. Up to 50 percent of the wells that we're testing were contaminated before my industry ever came into town."

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