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Tests: Lake Township wells already had issues

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS (STAFF WRITER)

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Warren Ruda/ The Citizens' Voice Citizens for Cleaner Energy placed several signs, including this one along Route 118 in Pikes Creek, to welcome gas driller Encana to town.



Kristen Mullen / The Citizens' Voice Panelists Brian Oram, SCE Environmental Group Inc., and principal geologist Joseph G. Casey answer questions Monday in Lake Township.

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LAKE TWP. - Before natural gas drilling even started in Lake Township, many property owners had some form of contamination in their private water wells.

Geologist Brian Oram revealed at Monday's meeting of the pro-drilling Citizens for Cleaner Energy that of 220 private wells tested near the drilling site, more than half had detectable - though not dangerous - levels of methane gas, and nearly half had high levels of bacteria.

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"For a pro-drilling crowd, the first two subjects we talked about are fresh drinking water and how to (protect the environment) as we proceed," Citizens for Cleaner Energy President Gary Ide noted to the more than 60 people attending the meeting at Outlet Free Methodist Church. "Everybody wants responsible drilling."

Encana Oil & Gas USA Inc. started drilling on the Zosh Road property of Paul and Amy Salansky a few weeks ago, after wrapping up drilling on Edward Buda's property off Route 118 in Fairmount Township. Amy Salansky said Encana finished drilling about 7,000 feet down and started drilling horizontally on Monday.

Before drilling started, Encana had the wells of property owners within a one-mile radius of the drill site tested. Oram said 247 samples were taken: 220 from private wells, 12 ponds, 10 streams and five springs.

Wilkes University, which Oram is affiliated with, established a database that allows people to share their well water test results so it can be compiled, analyzed and put to use.

"I work for absolutely no gas companies. I never had," Oram informed the group.

Of the private wells near the Salansky site, 45 percent had coliform bacteria levels and 5 percent had E. Coli bacteria counts that exceeded drinking water standards, Oram said.

There were 131 wells with detectable traces of methane, but only one of them - an unusually deep well - had a high level, he said. He said it is not gas from the Marcellus Shale, but from the shallower Catskill rock formation.

All 220 wells had detectable amounts of sodium, chloride, lead and naturally-occurring radioactive substances. But 25 wells had high lead levels, eight wells had high levels of arsenic and four wells had radiation levels above the standard.

"This should be important to all of us," Ide noted of the test result findings.

Two representatives of the SCE Environmental Group, President Jody Cordaro and Principal Geologist Joseph G. Casey also spoke about some of their natural gas-related environmental cleanup work and what gas companies can do to minimize the risk of accidents, such as taking measures to contain stormwater runoff.

Afterwards, Cordaro, Casey and Oram answered questions from the audience.

In answer to questions about the potential for contamination of water supplies such as the Huntsville and Ceasetown reservoirs, Oram said this is the time to pay more attention to water protection, no matter what source the pollution could come from.

Cordaro said he would be more concerned about the possibility of contamination from a 1,000 gallon fuel tank at a drilling site than from the process of hydraulic fracturing.

The goal of Citizens for Cleaner Energy is to encourage natural gas drilling to proceed in a "responsible, environmentally-sensitive way that protects our water sources," Ide said.

To show its support for the industry, the organization, which already has had "Welcome Encana" signs made up, now has "I'm a Friend of Marcellus" yard signs for members to display.

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The_Susquehannock 1 day ago

Regardless of the baseline contamination levels of some of the wells the main issue at stake here is whether or not we want a corporation, who doesn't vote or have to send their kids to war yet enjoys the same rights as a normal citizen, to control trillions of gallons of fresh water during a critical time period when fresh water world-wide is on the decline. Do we want to risk tainting trillions of gallons of freshwater so that a decaying industry could keep itself afloat for 25-30 years? Do we want to risk further collapsing the value of our commonwealth for the sake of a few short-sighted politicians who are being paid by corporate america? In poor states like PA, corporate America will always rule over us poor shmucks. They're the judge, the jury and the executioner..... Atleast CA has a governor willing to throw it all on the table to protect its citizens. We need more of that on the east coast.....

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cyrusthevyrus 1 day ago

I can't imagine why anyone would refuse a water analysis... anyway, one of the most important points made that night, development and poor runoff management, are major issues in the Back Mountain. Stop development! Go anywhere but here!

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Big Dan 1 day ago

How come they didn't take tests AFTER the drilling, and compare them to the BEFORE results? Or they just didn't release the before/after results yet? Or did they even take AFTER drilling tests? The article doesn't say.

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