

Landowners rallying in Albany Wednesday to ask legislators to stay out of DEC's way

By Steve Reilly • sreilly@gannett.com • June 8, 2010, 8:25 pm

Convincing the state that the Marcellus Shale can be drilled safely got a bit harder over the past several days, after natural gas explosions on rigs in Pennsylvania and West Virginia and two explosions in Texas.

Nevertheless, 400 to 500 Southern Tier landowners are expected to rally in Albany today, where they will ask legislators to stay out of the way of DEC's environmental review of hydraulic fracturing and halt all industry-thwarting legislation that's threatening to delay drilling even longer.

The rally is being organized by the Joint Landowners Coalition, a group of area landowners who have signed, or are hoping to sign, leases with natural gas companies.

At least 10 buses, each carrying up to 50 people, are expected to head to the rally from Broome, Tioga, Chenango and Sullivan counties. Landowners will be joined by members of the pipefitters, laborers and teamsters unions who are interested in the jobs drilling could bring to the region.

Dan Fitzsimmons, president of the coalition, said he supports the DEC's ongoing review of the Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement -- an assessment of the impact of hydraulic fracturing, expected to be completed sometime late this year -- but he doesn't think state lawmakers should stand in the agency's way.

"We'd like to have the SGEIS review released, (and) what we'd like to see our legislators do is stand down and bring the SGEIS out so we can see it and work on it," Fitzsimmons said. "If it needs something to be added to it afterwards, that's the time to do it."

Although a blowout on a rig in Clearfield County, Pa., on Friday explosions on a Texas pipeline and a West Virginia drilling pad Monday, and another Texas explosion on Tuesday have been cause for

alarm, Fitzsimmons said human errors made on a few rigs out of thousands shouldn't stand in the way of an industry that has proven to be safe and could bring tens of thousands of jobs to the region.

"We just had a scaffolding accident at a construction site Are we going to stop building now?" Fitzsimmons said. "We can't do that. We have to see what these mistakes are, learn from them, and then adjust."

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