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## Monitors to check streams in gas-drilling areas

By Andrew Maykuth

INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Responding to growing concerns that the Marcellus gas boom may cause an increase in water pollution, the Susquehanna River Basin Commission announced today that it would install a network of electronic monitors to measure water quality on streams in the gas-drilling areas.

The commission said the 30 monitors would provide real-time data on water quality to alert officials to any sudden changes that might indicate a spill or a leak, said Susan Obleski, spokeswoman for the basin commission.

The aim of the monitors, which are being paid for by one of the gas-drilling companies active in northern Pennsylvania, is to avert some of the damage and fish kills that have been attributed to drilling and mining activities.

The monitors will also provide officials with a baseline of information about water quality in the Susquehanna tributaries in north-central Pennsylvania and New York, where drillers are dramatically escalating efforts to extract gas from the Marcellus Shale formation, which underlies much of the Appalachian range.

"With the current concerns about the natural gas drilling activities occurring in the Susquehanna basin, SRBC believes that a data-collection effort is critically important as the basis for making future decisions," Paul Swartz, the commission's executive director, said in a statement.

The \$750,000 cost of installing the monitors is being underwritten by East Resources Inc., a natural gas company in Warrendale, Pa. East Resources holds about 750,000 acres of Marcellus Shale reserves in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and New York. Its Pennsylvania holdings are concentrated in Tioga County, in the Upper Susquehanna watershed.

The industry's aim is to ease concerns that spills from hydraulic fracturing of gas-bearing shale pose a danger.

"We firmly believe that the Marcellus Shale will be developed with little impact on water resources," Terry Pegula, chief executive officer of East Resources, said in a news release. He said the investment represented the company's "long-term commitment to the economic vitality and environmental quality of the region."

The development of gas-shale wells, which involve pumping millions of gallons of water and chemicals

into each bore hole to fracture the rock and liberate the gas, has raised concerns about the treatment and disposal of wastewater. The water contains chemicals from the hydro-fracking fluid, as well as salts and metals from the source rock.

The commission hopes to begin installing the equipment as soon as next month. The commission is still seeking funding to pay for the annual cost of operating the monitoring system - \$115,000, which includes equipment servicing, data transmission, and management fees. It is also planning to expand the network beyond the initial number of 30 monitoring stations.

The monitoring network will provide constant data collection, with instruments sensitive enough to detect subtle changes in water quality, Obleski said.

The devices will continuously monitor and report water temperature, acidity, dissolved oxygen, ability to conduct electricity, and turbidity.


A change in electrical conductivity is considered a critical leading indicator of an impact associated with natural gas activities, the commission said. The monitors will also record water depth, a measure of the volume of water flowing in the streams.

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Contact staff writer Andrew Maykuth at 215-854-2947 or [amaykuth@phillynews.com](mailto:amaykuth@phillynews.com).

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