

New Jerseyans need to oppose fracking in Delaware River Basin



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COMMENTARY



Hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking” as it is commonly known, is the process used to extract natural gas from shale rock by fracturing it with high-pressure fluids. Highly toxic chemicals are used in the drilling process, which has devastating effects the environment and human health.

The Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) – a five member board that includes New Jersey – is now accepting public comments on draft gas drilling regulations which have been fast-tracked and could be released soon ahead of the completion of any environmental impact studies. The draft regulations provide for little, if any, oversight of the industry and fail to protect the Delaware River from contamination.

One third of New Jersey residents get their water from the Delaware River Basin. We need to let regulators know how strongly we object to the contamination of our drinking water, so please add your voice. The public comment deadline is April 15th

at 5 p.m. To email your comments directly to the DRBC, go [here](#) and click on the “Open for Comment” link on the left. For more information on the DRBC’s draft regulations and what’s wrong with them, click [here](#).

The DRBC is charged with a legal mandate to prevent degradation of the water quality of the Delaware River. The 5 members of the DRBC are the governors of the four basin states -- New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware – and a federal representative. John Plonski, one of Governor Christie’s alternates, is pushing for the early release of fracking regulations. And let me remind you, he speaks for the Governor.

So why is our water being polluted when the industry insists that gas extraction is done at depths well below the water table? Because contamination occurs when the casings are pulled back up, bringing the chemicals and bacteria with them. Vertical fissures that occur naturally in the earth are another reason. Toxins and microbes at drilling depths seep up through those fissures, and this can’t be controlled. Gas extraction is not an exact science, and so there can be no guarantee of safety. In fact, the high-volume drilling in Pennsylvania has been plagued with problems.

Even without chemical additives, the wastewater from gas extraction would be toxic because naturally-occurring contaminants and radioactive materials – radon, salts, and heavy metals – are brought up from the ground.

Much of the wastewater just sits in large open storage pits at drilling sites, where overflow and run-off occur. If the pits aren’t lined or linings tear, toxins seep directly into the ground. These pits are also a major source of air pollution because the toxins volatilize to the air, and then are breathed in or deposited on soil and water. Drilling companies have the option of injecting the collected wastewater back into the ground or shipping it to a publicly owned treatment works, if they can find one to take it. Illegal dumping has already been discovered in other states.

Currently there is no national treatment standard that applies to the wastewater. In fact, there is virtually no regulatory oversight of gas drilling or disposal operations at all, at either the state or federal level. The gas industry is exempted from numerous laws, including the Safe Drinking Water Act, Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, and Superfund law, to name a few.

There are a number of bills that are currently moving through Congress. One is the Fracturing Responsibility and Awareness of Chemicals (FRAC) Act (H.R. 1084, S. 587). The FRAC Act would bring the hydrofracking industry under the purview of the EPA. New Jersey Congressman Rush Holt was among the first to support the bill.

Another federal bill is the BREATHE Act (H.R. 1204), which would allow the combined pollution of many gas wells to be regulated under the Clean Air Act. BREATHE stands for “Bringing Reductions to Energy’s Airborne Toxic Health Effects.”

The “Ban” bill (A. 3313, S. 2576) would ban fracking in the state of New Jersey. It received unanimous approval by the Senate Environment and Energy Committee. There could be floor vote as soon as May, so now is the time to contact your New Jersey senators to voice your support!

If you need convincing that water supplies are being contaminated by hydraulic fracturing, catch a screening of the now well-known documentary “Gasland”. Also check out an interview PBS did with the film’s creator, Josh Fox.

We have only one clean water supply. When it's gone, it's gone. The damage can't be undone.

As if the devastation to our water supply isn't enough, another consequence of fracking is the release of methane, a greenhouse gas 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

If we needed more reason to support renewable energy, we have it.

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