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## Marcellus shale hearing ... Ensuring the protection of our resources

Friday, February 19, 2010

By **Liza Matia** Staff Writer

State Rep. Camille "Bud" George, D-74 of Houtzdale, chairman of the House Environmental Resources and Energy Committee, sponsored a hearing yesterday on House Bill 2213, the Land and Water Protection Act. The legislation was designed to reduce the adverse impacts to the environment from gas drilling in Marcellus shale deposit.

George said he anticipates a great deal of activity to come from the drilling of Marcellus shale.

"We're no stranger to gas well exploration," he said, "but Marcellus presents new challenges to drilling."

George said those challenges must be examined and understood to ensure the protection of the industry and environment. George drafted the legislation to mitigate the risks to land and water posed by the expansion of gas well drilling in the commonwealth. House Bill 2213 would require the state Department of Environmental Protection to inspect Marcellus drill

sites during each drilling phase. It would also extend the liability of a well polluting a water supply and require the disclosure of chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing of the natural gas from the earth. The bill would also update bonding requirements and clarify a local government's authority to regulate gas and oil activities.

According to Chairman Scott Hutchinson, a state representative from Venango County, Pennsylvania needs to make sure the laws are adequate to deal with problems that may arise with drilling.

"We need to take advantage of the wonderful natural resource," he said.

Yesterday, the committee heard testimony from DEP, the Susquehanna River Basin Commission, PennFuture and the Marcellus Shale Coalition.

"Our job is to produce gas and protect the future," said John Hines, deputy secretary for water management from DEP. He explained the Marcellus shale gas reserve could potentially hold "enough gas to fully supply the nation for 10 or more years." Hines added producing that gas could create new wealth as well as new jobs, "but not at the sacrifice of our water resources."

Hydraulic fracturing, the process used to extract the gas from the earth, would require large amounts of water to be pumped into the shale formation to fracture the shale and allow the gas to flow freely. During this process, Hines said some water could flow back to the surface. The water used in hydraulic fracturing would then have to be treated to remove chemicals and minerals.

During his testimony, Hines attempted to dispel rumors that certain "secret" chemicals were used in the fracing process. He said that DEP distributed a list to the public of all the chemicals that were used. Hines said the Material Safety Data Sheets were also distributed to local emergency responders. The list is available on DEP's Web site. Hines added that while DEP is aware of the chemicals that are used, the exact portions of those chemicals is unknown. He said the industry considers this a "trade secret."

George said he was "amazed" that the material used in fracing is a "trade secret." "How do you know it's treated properly if you don't know what it is," George asked, noting that some of those chemicals could potentially be toxic. He also questioned the portion of material that remains in the ground after fracing.

According to Scott Perry of DEP, approximately one-third of the flow back stays in the ground.

State Rep. Matt Gabler, R-75 of DuBois, questioned the possibility of gas migration and how it happens. Perry explained that improper casing and coupling are some of

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the main reasons. He said that cement has been successful in protecting approximately 120,000 wells and said it is "very uncommon for cement casing to fail." When casings do fail, Perry said, the issue could be bad welding or poor coupling.

Thomas Beauduy, deputy director and counsel of the Susquehanna River Basin Commission, spoke on the issues of diminution of water supplies. He explained that the River Basin Commission regulates the withdrawal and consumptive use of water associated with natural gas development activity. He pointed to the past and said that mineral exploitation has occurred at the expense of society and the environmental risk was transferred to the public.

"We don't want to repeat that history and perpetuate that legacy," Beauduy said. "We need to be smart and use the lessons we've learned."

Beauduy said the Marcellus shale gas drilling would use approximately 28 million gallons of water per day. Comparatively, he noted that the power industry uses approximately 3.4 billion gallons and the golf industry uses 10 times more water than Marcellus drilling would.

When George questioned the possibility of using hydrology that remains in the earth in order to recycle water already used by industries, Beauduy said it would be possible.

"We've tried to incentivize that," he said. "We consider all the water used as a loss to the basin."

John Baillie, senior attorney for Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future, also known as PennFuture, pointed out that Marcellus shale is "not the only gas-bearing geologic formation in Pennsylvania." He said the same drilling techniques used to extract gas from the shale are also likely used to extract gas from other formations.

Due to that fact, Baillie said the same water pollution concerns addressed with Marcellus shale have also arisen with those other formations.

He suggested House Bill 2213 be revised to protect not only Marcellus shale gas wells, but also any other gas extraction activities that use the same drilling techniques.

House Bill 2213 was introduced on Jan. 20. The act is expected to take effect 60 days from that date.

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