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PIOGA, API launch new Marcellus shale effort

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WASHINGTON, DC, Jan. 20 -- The Pennsylvania Independent Oil & Gas Association (PIOGA) and the American Petroleum Institute have formed a Marcellus shale public education alliance to provide facts about the tight shale gas resource's energy and economic potential. Opponents, meanwhile, apparently will concentrate on counties and townships following substantial Republican gains in November's elections at the state level.

The partnership will serve as the two organizations' Marcellus shale public information arm, officials said. It will focus on Pennsylvania and is part of API's coordinated program to address high-priority oil and gas issues.

"This partnership will increase informed dialogue among Pennsylvanians and promote a strong local economy through energy development," said Rolf Hanson, executive director of the Associated Petroleum Industries of Pennsylvania, an API state affiliate. "API is continuing to work with Pennsylvanians who are committed to improving the public's understanding of, and support for, the many opportunities presented by the Marcellus shale natural gas reserves in the commonwealth."

Louis D. D'Amico, PIOGA's president and executive director, said the collaboration builds on PIOGA's commitment to create a favorable job creation environment in the Keystone State. "We are a solution-oriented organization, and working with [API] will help our members educate a larger number of Pennsylvanians," he maintained.

Opponents to Marcellus shale development are refocusing efforts on county and local governments following the election in November of Republican Tom Corbett as governor, along with enough GOP candidates to wrest control of the House from Democrats and increase the GOP's majority in the Senate. Corbett was inaugurated on Jan. 19, and Pennsylvania's general assembly will reconvene on Jan. 24 in Harrisburg.

Opponents also are preparing to fight not only additional exploration and production, but also new gas pipeline construction. "Besides [hydraulic fracturing], huge amounts of fresh water usage, [and] disposal of tainted water from fracing flowback, compressor stations [and] pipelines are yet another aspect of the natural gas industry that have major downsides," one e-mail message obtained by OGJ said. "Sometimes they leak gas; sometimes they blow up; sometimes the industry wants to put them in the dumbest places. Would you want one in your backyard?"

In a Jan. 20 address to the New York Society of Security Analysts, American Gas Association Chairman John W.

Somerhalder II said pipeline safety will be a chief legislative and regulatory priority in 2011 for the association, represents gas utilities.

Somerhalder, who also is chairman and chief executive officer of Atlanta-based AGL Resources Inc., said AGA would pursue reauthorization of the federal Pipeline Safety Act and work with the US Department of Transportation and state regulators on implementing an effective distribution integrity management program.

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