



Pennsylvania regulators OK new gas-drilling safeguards

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MARC LEVY
Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. – Crews rushing to drill deep, high-pressure wells into the vast Marcellus Shale reservoir beneath Pennsylvania will soon have tougher safety standards to obey as regulators work to modernize the state's environmental protection laws.

The Independent Regulatory Review Commission, the gatekeeper of Pennsylvania state regulations, unanimously approved a set of proposed standards at its Thursday meeting. The rules are expected to be published and final no later than January.

"Today's action is another major step in making sure that Pennsylvania updates its regulations and grows its oversight with the Marcellus industry," Environmental Protection Secretary John Hanger said after the vote.

Hanger's agency wrote the proposal, the latest of several sets of new regulations designed to protect waterways and drinking water supplies from natural gas migrating underground, well-site chemical spills and the massive volumes of toxic sludge that comes out of newly drilled wells.

The regulations would lower the maximum allowable well pressure, raise standards for well cement and pipes and strengthen the industry's obligations to investigate and report incidents of gas migrating out of well bores and into residential water wells.

"I think the standards we have now, if employed in the past, ... would have prevented the problems we've seen up in Bradford County and Susquehanna County," said Scott Perry, director of the department's bureau of oil and gas management.

Perry said he views the new standards as "state of the art."

The regulations also will require drilling companies to send electronic well-completion reports to the department that include the volumes and identities of chemicals used in each well.

While the volumes may be kept confidential by the department as a trade secret that is exempt from the public's right to know, the department will be able to produce a publicly available map that shows which chemical was injected underground at each well site, Perry said.



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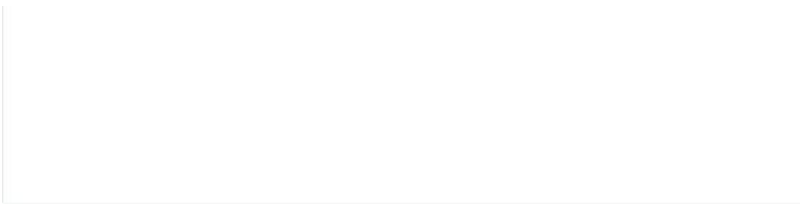
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Brice Jannar

November 18, 2010, 8:04 PM

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