

## Pollution figures can be misleading

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At any other time, a story revising the amount of wastewater recycled from drilling operations would be just another correction. When it involves the water used in hydraulic fracturing, the technique used to extract natural gas from deep below the surface, and when the revision makes the difference between good and terrible, then it's time to pay attention.

Pollution is a major issue for people who worry about the effects of hydrofracking. Recent articles in The New York Times document how politics and science have collided to raise questions about just how much we know about the short- and long-term effects of the drilling and how much more we should know before going ahead on the large scale proposed by drillers, landowners and others who stand to make a lot of money.

Those who defend hydrofracking say they have comprehensive procedures in place ensuring the safety of people who live in and around drilling sites. That includes the rivers and streams where the wastewater ends up and the extent to which the water is treated before it gets there.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection said last month that drillers were doing a lot of recycling, about 65 percent of the 10.6 million barrels of wastewater produced in the last six months of 2010. In addition, the industry put millions of barrels into underground disposal wells, leading some to claim that overall, about 90 percent of the wastewater was treated, stored or otherwise prevented from causing harm.

Now, as the Philadelphia Inquirer reported last week, all those figures are in doubt. It turns out that one company made a huge mistake in reporting its numbers to the state EPA. It reported handling 5.2 million barrels of wastewater when it actually meant to say that it treated 125,000 barrels.

With some going to plants that discharge treated wastewater into rivers and streams and some questions about just what gets removed in treatment and what needs to, it's safe to say that nobody knows today just how much pollution hydrofracking creates in Pennsylvania.

It may be too late to do anything about it there, but there is plenty of time for New York to insist that we know the real story before allowing anyone to start drilling.