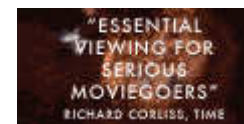


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Safe, Not Sorry, on Drilling

The Cuomo administration seems prepared to strike the right balance between environmental protection and economic development as it writes the rules that will govern hydraulic fracturing, a controversial technique used to extract natural gas from shale formations.

A long-awaited report issued July 1 by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation recognizes hydraulic fracturing's potential dangers to water supplies and recommends a flat ban on drilling inside New York City's sprawling watershed. It would ban drilling in the Syracuse watershed, in aquifers used by other cities and towns, and in state parks and wildlife preserves.

The report, however, is merely a draft. The final environmental assessment and the detailed regulations to follow must be tightly drawn before New Yorkers can be confident that the gas will be extracted with minimum risk.

Nobody doubts the value of natural gas, an abundant, cleaner and more climate-friendly fuel than coal or oil. What worries many people is hydraulic fracturing, in which water, sand and chemicals are blasted into underground rock formations to unlock the gas. The technique has been used, mostly without incident, in hundreds of thousands of wells. But the risks have multiplied as wells are drilled deeper and stretched horizontally to get at remote deposits. A single site can cough up millions of gallons of wastewater laced with carcinogens like benzene and radioactive elements like radium.

The department is forming a scientific committee to further assess these dangers and recommend additional precautions. The biggest challenge, most experts agree, is figuring out ways to store and treat the huge volumes of contaminated water that drilling brings to the surface along with the natural gas.

Environmental groups like the [Natural Resources Defense Council](#) have already identified one huge defect in the report: it proposes a buffer zone of only 1,000 feet around two major water tunnels that technically lie outside the million-acre New York City watershed but carry millions of gallons a day to the city. These tunnels are decades old and could easily be cracked open by drilling vibrations. They clearly deserve greater protections.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo is obviously eager to proceed with more drilling. But the right rules must be

in place first. Albany should not rush to finish its final assessment.