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# Shale debate packs house

January 13, 2011 - By JOSHUA S. FLESHER Tribune Chronicle

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NEWTON FALLS - Education is the key when it comes to natural gas drilling into Marcellus Shale, according to a leader of a concerned citizens group who called a public meeting Wednesday inside Newton Falls Community Center.

"We've all been approached," said Lori Babbey of the Concerned Citizens of Portage County. "We need to continue educating ourselves and educating our neighbors."

Babbey was referring to the drilling companies that have been attempting to lease people's property in order to set up drilling sites to extract the natural gas, mainly in rural areas.

Marcellus Shale, a pocket of natural gas that sits deep below Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York and West Virginia, has become the center of controversy as natural gas drillers attempt to use a hydraulic fracking pro-cess to tap into the resource, but neighbors fear it will damage underground water supplies.

Wednesday, dozens of residents packed into the community center in an attempt to learn more about the issue.

"Natural gas drilling is inherently risky," said Dusty Horwitt, a guest speaker and member of the Environmental Working Group.

Hydraulic fracking is a process in which a well is drilled and then millions of gallons of water and other chemicals are pumped into it at high pressure. The pressure breaks up the shale and opens the pockets of natural gas that can then flow out of the well.

Citing a number of situations that have occurred in Pennsylvania, Ohio and further west into Colorado, Babbey and Horwitt relayed stories of people who have experienced hardships as a result of frack drilling.

But two representatives from Chesapeake Energy out of Canonsburg, Pa., who attended Wednesday's meeting said they were concerned that some information being thrown about is not accurate. They said safeguards are in place to protect water supplies.

"I think there was some information presented tonight, and some was accurate," said Ryan Dean, senior coordinator-corporate development with Chesapeake. "We can explain our procedures and safe guards that make our industry a safe and effective one."

The presentation was brought to Newton Falls by Newton Township Trustee Peter Augusta as a way to help inform the citizens of his township and surrounding areas about fracking.

"We put this information out, even though its all against fracking, so at least they have something," he said. "There are two sides to it and it's up to the person if they want to do it."

Augusta said he would like to see the issue expand to the county level.

"I think it should go a step further, to the county level," he said.



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...commissioners go a step further, to the county level, he said.  
"What do the commissioners think about it?"

Newton Falls City Councilman Richard Zamecnik stated he would be willing to support legislation to prohibit frack drilling inside the city to avoid any possible contamination to the city's water supply.

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