

## Local News

# Making the case for drilling in New York

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BINGHAMTON — Dr. Don Siegel said Thursday he is tired of all the hype.

He is tired, he said, of seeing what he calls “an enourmous amount of misinformation” about natural gas drilling, specifically hydrolic fracturing, being distributed and broadcast by the media.

Siegel, a hydrogeology professor at Syracuse University, was part of a five-member panel who spoke at a news conference Thursday at the Holiday Inn Arena.

The goal of the conference, said Broome County Executive Barbara J. Fiala, was to put experts, industry personnel, organized labor and politicians together to discuss the drilling process known as fracking and to debunk the misinformation.

“I am offended by the opposition’s efforts to paint an innacurate picture of what this drilling techonlogy does to the environment,” Siegel said. “It’s time someone spoke in favor or informed decision-making.”

Fracking involves pumping a mix of chemicals, sand and water into rock formations deep under ground. The process opens fractures in the rock, allowing natural gas or oil to escape into a well for later extraction.

Such wells are drilled at an average depth of 1.5 miles below the surface, according to literature circulated by America’s Natural Gas Alliance. Such a depth, noted Siegel and industry representative Mark Scheuerman of Talisman Energy, is too deep to have an effect on on dinking water.

However, what happens near the well’s opening, noted Scheuerman, is what matters most.

“There needs to be a focus on what happens on the surface rather than what happens under ground,” said Scheuerman, speaking about regulatory oversight. “Sure, the chemicals we use need to be regulated and they need to be handled carefully. But oftentimes it’s more important to focus on what happens above ground rather than below.”



Scheuerman and Siegel both used Dimock, Pa., as an example of what can happen when things are "allowed" to go wrong at a gas drilling site. Cabot Oil and Gas Corp., which operates heavily in Susquehanna County, is facing lawsuits and fines for spills of fracking fluids and deisel fuel that has fouled drinking water in the township.

As of March of this year Cabot had drilled about 30 horizontal wells, of which 14 were online and producing sales to the national grid.

The Dimock experience was included in a recent documentary called "Gasland," a Sundance Film Festival award winner which is currently airing on HBO.

"New York is learning a lot from Pennsylvania," Siegel said. "What happened in Dimock is horrible, no doubt about it. But we have to remember that if there is a failure of some kind, it usually stays local. It affects some, but it does not migrate to other places. It is not at all like we're seeing in the Gulf."

Fiala, in her opening remarks, said proper oversight and regulations would be key to making natural gas drilling work in New York, adding that everyone in the state can benefit from it.

"We can be a model for the rest of the country," she said.

"To do this, we need to have a well-funded DEC," said Schuerman, who advocated an expanded regulatory agency. "If we are to have a long tenure here, there can be no tolerance for not doing this safely and correctly."

Binghamton Mayor Matthew T. Ryan, who was not among the panelists but attended the conference, raised the question of funding for an expanded DEC. He asked why New York state taxpayers should be made to foot the bill.

"Again, we need to look to Pennsylvania," Scheuerman said. "They've generated enough funds in a tax neutral way. They've raised permit fees from \$100 in the beginning to in some places \$4,000 today. We support this. It's fair to burden the industry in order to fund the regulatory system and keep our business going."

Gas drilling in New York is on hold due to an environmental review being conducted by the DEC. The agency expects to release its Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement, which looks directly at the environmental impacts of fracking and horizontal drilling, later this year.

EDITOR'S NOTE: See Saturday's Morning Times for more on the economic impacts of natural gas drilling in New York and Pennsylvania.

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