

## State-ordered DEC job cuts raise gas-drilling concerns

209 workers targeted, according to memo

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Cuts to the state Department of Environmental Conservation's work force could slow natural gas development in New York, according to an internal document written to the governor's budget office.

The DEC has been instructed by Gov. David Paterson's office to cut 209 workers -- about 6.6 percent of its current staff -- by year's end, which "may result in potential serious risks to human health and safety and environmental quality," the agency wrote in the memo, which was obtained by this newspaper and other news outlets.

According to the department, the DEC had 3,775 full-time employees in April 2008. If the staff cuts go through, it will have lost 849 full-time employees since then.

"In contrast to the past, we no longer have a general capacity for incremental reductions," the unsigned, undated memo reads. "All the meat has been stripped from the bones and some of the bones have disappeared."

Staff reduction could make permitting and oversight of Marcellus Shale drilling sites difficult, the DEC contends. The department is reviewing its permitting guidelines, and drilling for gas in the Marcellus -- a gas-rich formation underneath much of the Southern Tier and Pennsylvania -- remains on hold in New York until they are finalized.

From the memo: "Cuts to our Minerals Division will mean fewer staff available to review applications and oversee activities related to natural gas drilling in Marcellus Shale."

A spokesman for the DEC did not return a call seeking comment, but one from Paterson's Division of Budget stressed nothing is final.

"DOB is reviewing all agencies' proposals. Nothing is final yet," said Erik Kriss, a spokesman for the budget office. "We will make the appropriate determination in the context of the entire state work force and the work force reduction levels that have

been set for the end of the calendar year."

The DEC memo said the department would not make across-the-board cuts, but would target specific programs "to eliminate or greatly curtail."

"Many of our programs are hanging by a thread," the memo reads. "The public would be shocked to learn how thin we are in many areas -- in many instances, we have offices or sections responsible for important permitting and monitoring functions staffed by only one or two people."

Paterson announced in September that New York would cut 2,000 positions from the state work force by Dec. 31 in an effort to save \$250 million, though about half of that amount was realized through a pair of early retirement programs, according to Kriss. The DEC memo said it does not expect much attrition, and the "directive will essentially result in 209 layoffs at DEC."

Dereth Glance, executive program director for the Citizens Campaign for the Environment, said the extent of the staff cuts "endanger public health" and would further hinder the DEC's ability to safely police natural gas drilling operations.

"We obviously don't have the staff that can provide that independent oversight to ensure that our water resources and our land are protected, and that the water is not contaminated," Glance said.

A gas industry trade group also spoke out against the cuts, saying the agency needs a bolstered work force "to adequately administer natural gas and oil



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well permitting and enforcement" and calling on any permit fee revenue to be dedicated to additional staff.

"... (R)evenue from increased taxes resulting from overall economic impact would easily be more than enough to sustain the retention of DEC staff," said Brad Gill, president of the Independent Oil and Gas Association of New York. "New York must move expeditiously to tap this natural resource in a safe, efficient and environmentally sound way."



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