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Survey shows Pa. residents concerned about fracking

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By Laura Legere

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Pennsylvanians are more aware and more concerned about the natural gas extraction process of hydraulic fracturing than the national average, according to survey results released Tuesday by a Massachusetts-based nonprofit that supports renewable energy development.

Knowledge and concern about the issue is varied throughout the state, with residents in Western Pennsylvania more likely to know about fracking as an issue than those in the northeast and central parts of the state, while Philadelphia-area residents are the most likely to say they are "very

concerned" about fracking, according to the poll by the Civil Society Institute.

The state survey was conducted among 403 adults from Nov. 26-30 with a margin of error of 5 percent. The national survey was conducted among 1,012 adults with a margin of error of 3 percent.

Pam Solo, founder and president of the Civil Society Institute, said concern about fracking "illustrates the point that Americans don't think of an energy source as cheap or clean if there is a hidden price in terms of safe drinking water and human health," she said.

Natural gas industry groups criticized the survey for asking leading questions and implying a false choice between clean water and natural gas.

Kathryn Klaber, president of the Marcellus Shale Coalition, said that the questions "were overwhelmingly structured in such a way to generate predetermined outcomes" but added that it is "clear â our industry must continue to educate communities about the steps we're taking each day to protect and strengthen the environment" while producing the gas.

Chris Tucker, spokesman for Energy in Depth, characterized the survey as "garbage in, garbage out."

"You're used to seeing 'push' polls in this business, but rarely do you see one where the respondent is picked up and thrown down a flight of stairs," he said. "The entire questionnaire is set up in a way that forces people to choose between drinking water and natural gas, as if those are the only two options out there."

Hydraulic fracturing is the process of breaking apart gas-bearing rock formations by injecting large volumes of water mixed with sand and chemicals underground. It is a crucial step for extracting gas from shale formations, including the Marcellus Shale that underlies much of Pennsylvania.

Findings from the survey include:

n 60 percent of Pennsylvanians say they are "very" or "somewhat" aware of hydraulic fracturing as an issue, while 50 percent of New Yorkers and 44 percent of adults nationally had a similar level of awareness.

n Of those aware of fracking, 79 percent in Pennsylvania expressed concern about its potential impact on water quality. Nationally, 69 percent of adults had similar levels of concern. Among all of the adults surveyed in Pennsylvania, 81 percent said they are concerned about the potential for state drinking water sources to be compromised by fracking.

n Half of Pennsylvanians said the potential threat to drinking water posed by fracking is either "very" or "somewhat" acceptable if it means lower heating bills. Forty-seven percent said it is unacceptable.

llegere@timeshamrock.com

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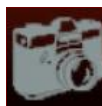


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