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Talisman talks on drilling

BY NANCY SHARER (FOR THE REVIEW)
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It all starts with a lease.

Jim O'Driscoll, vice president of external relations for Talisman Energy USA Inc., took a few moments during his company's open house Tuesday in Warren Center to explain the basics of natural gas drilling.

When that lease is signed, Talisman begins exploring for minerals through seismic testing, which maps underground rocks.

Once it finds a spot to drill, it gets the necessary permits and clears a flat, five-acre area of land there. Then it starts drilling "with a rig like this," O'Driscoll said, pointing to a Talisman brochure photo showing a tall, thin tower with a wooded hill in the background and cows in a pasture in front.

Drills chew their way down 4,000-6,000 feet, then turn and aim outward another 3,000-5,000.

After about 25 days, Talisman brings in "completion equipment" and fractures or "fracs" the underground rocks with water to release any gas.

"We subcontract a lot of the work," O'Driscoll explained. For example, one company may prepare the pad, another may actually drill, while yet another completes the work.

If gas comes out, Talisman tests it and builds a pipeline to ship it to a main line. If the gas needs more pressure to reach the main line, Talisman builds a compression station to boost it along.

To start, a typical well may produce 4 million to 6 million cubic feet of gas a day. As time passes, the amount declines.

According to O'Driscoll, there's no set distance between pads or pattern. Talisman drills where it finds good sites and has leased land.

Years later, after the well stops producing, Talisman restores the five-acre pad.

The gas Talisman's after comes from an underground rock formation called the "Marcellus Shale." This shale covers about 95,000 square miles, O'Driscoll said, stretching from southern New York to Kentucky. A map in a Talisman brochure showed a bright red patch - Marcellus Shale - over most of Pennsylvania and West Virginia, and lapping into Ohio, Maryland and Virginia.

"People always knew that the Marcellus contained natural gas," he said. But it's been only recently with the development of horizontal drilling and fracing that they have pursued drilling here.

So let's talk about it: money. If you have a well on your land, or nearby, how much will you get?

It depends.

Talisman sets up production units of 500-600 acres, each unit holding a pad with six wells. The well "arms" reach in opposite directions, like a bug's legs.

Say you own 50 acres in that unit and signed a lease for 15 percent of any gas royalties. Fifty acres is one-tenth of 500. "So you'll get 15 percent of one-tenth of the revenue," per month, O'Driscoll said.

And how much will that revenue be? That will depend on how much natural gas is selling for, and how much the well's producing.

However much it is, it won't stay at that level. As O'Driscoll explained, wells produce more to start, then decline with time.

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- Outer space
- An enchanted village
- A big city
- A dark forest
- The time of dinosaurs
- 100 years in the future
- On a football field
- In a small town
- In an exotic location

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