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## Water agency publishes gas drilling regulations

Associated Press

ALLENTOWN, Pa. — The agency that oversees water quality and quantity in the Delaware River basin issued proposed regulations for the natural gas drilling industry, launching what is certain to be a heated debate pitting energy companies and leaseholders against environmentalists, sporting groups and residents worried about their drinking water supplies.

The Delaware River Basin Commission published the long-awaited regulations on its website Thursday morning. They govern a range of drilling activities, including water withdrawals, well pad siting and wastewater disposal. The proposed rules also require drilling companies to post a "financial assurance" of \$125,000 per well.

"The draft regulations establish requirements to prevent, reduce or mitigate depletion and degradation of surface and groundwater resources and to promote sound practices of watershed management," the commission said in a news release.

The commission has declared a moratorium on Marcellus Shale drilling projects in the Delaware River basin until the rulemaking process is complete. The panel has jurisdiction because the drilling process will require the withdrawal of huge amounts of water from the watershed's streams and rivers. The commission has also cited the potential for groundwater and surface water contamination.

Drilling is in full swing elsewhere in Pennsylvania.

Energy companies have leased thousands of acres of land in Pennsylvania's unspoiled northeastern tip, hoping to tap vast stores of gas in a sprawling rock formation — the Marcellus Shale — that some experts believe could become the nation's most productive gas field. Farmers and other landowners say drilling will bring jobs and prosperity. Drilling opponents contend that large-scale gas exploration so close to crucial waterways threatens environmental catastrophe.

Both sides have been lobbying the basin commission, a powerful federal-interstate compact agency that monitors water supplies for 15 million people, including half the population of New York City.

Environmental groups and some politicians, including New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, wanted the agency to complete a planned cumulative impact study before issuing the regulations.

"Because full-scale development of natural gas exploitation in the watershed could degrade water quality, a rush to regulate and drill risks the long-term viability of one of the most important drinking water sources in the United States," Bloomberg wrote last month to Carol Collier, the DRBC's executive director.

The Delaware Riverkeeper Network, a nonprofit advocacy group, criticized the rules even before they were issued.

"It's a grave mistake for the DRBC to rush forward with half-baked regulations before the needed scientific analysis is done through a cumulative impact analysis," Tracy Carluccio, the group's deputy director, said in a statement in advance of the regulations' publication.

Thursday's publication began a 90-comment period. Three public hearings on the draft regulations are planned. Dates and locations have not been finalized.

The Marcellus Shale is a rock formation 6,000 to 8,000 feet beneath Pennsylvania, New York, West Virginia and Ohio, including about 36 percent of the Delaware River basin. New drilling techniques now allow affordable access to supplies in the Marcellus and other shales in the U.S. that once were too expensive to tap.

Energy companies combine horizontal drilling with hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," a controversial technique that injects vast amounts of water, along with sand and chemicals, underground to break up the shale and release the gas. The Environmental Protection Agency is planning a study of the environmental and health consequences of fracking.

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