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Wyoming waiting on gas drilling rules

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WARSAW — Officials in Wyoming County are awaiting the results of a state environmental study which could help set guidelines for natural gas drilling.

Town Supervisor James Flieschman of Java updated county Farm Bureau members on the Marcellus Shale issue Tuesday, during the organization's annual meeting with the county Board of Supervisors. Fleischman chairs the county's Marcellus Shale subcommittee.

"These situations are really going to move once the (state Department of Environmental Conservation) comes out and gives us the guidelines," he said. "What you'll see in our area is existing wells being refreshed and re-directed.

"You won't see a big onslaught of new drilling here," he continued. "It's probably about 10 years out. They're going to start in the Binghamton and state line areas and gradually move up."

Natural gas drilling — including a water-intensive process called "fracking" has increasingly been an issue in the Southern Tier, as developers begin tapping into the Marcellus Shale's natural gas deposits. Officials believe the drilling will eventually make its way into the county's southern portion.

Fracking is a process in which large amounts of water, lubricants and other chemicals are pumped beneath the earth to help release natural gas. The wastewater is eventually recovered and the practice is common out west.

The federal government has ruled the process safe, but it remains controversial.

Fleischman said the Marcellus Shale layer becomes increasingly shallow and thinner as it approaches the Great Lakes basin. Companies would want to focus on the Southern Tier and northern Pennsylvania before making their way north.

Road use agreements may represent the only real control local governments have over the drilling, he said. They'll need to set policies for trucks over their highways, while trying not to affect heavy farm vehicles.

The county will adopt a policy, and encourage towns to do the same, Fleischman said.

The drilling remains a concern.

Farm Bureau member Gus Youngers said he heard the drilling has fouled water wells in Pennsylvania.

"Especially for dairy," he said. "If anybody loses their water quality they've got problems, but for dairy, if we lose the quality of water for our cattle, we're done," he said.

Fleischman said the state DEC study and its recommendations are expected in June or July. He said he wished he could give more details, but thedailynewsonline.com/.../article_e318...

the agency has been tight-lipped.

“There’s not a lot of information coming out about what’s going to be involved in that Environmental Impact Statement,” he said. “That’s one of the major concerns we’ve talked about and hashed out at the various Marcellus committee meetings. If I could I’d give you more definite information, but I can’t at this point.”

Officials hope the statement will include a provision requiring testing of all wells within a certain radius of drill sites, at the driller’s expense, Fleischman said.

Vertical gas well drilling has occurred for decades in much of the Southern Tier and Western New York. Hundreds of active wells are in current use.

Those numbers are expected to increase as new gas reserves are discovered and new horizontal drilling techniques are used. The state has enacted a moratorium on such new practices until the DEC completes its review.

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