

Independent Oil and Gas Assoc. of NY Meets with Residents
by Sue Smith-Heavenrich
sueh@broaderviewweekly.com
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Over the past month the Independent Oil and Gas Association of New York (IOGA-NY) has been hosting informational meetings in communities across the state. About 60 people showed up at Corning Community College on September 3 to hear what gas industry representatives had to say about drilling in Marcellus shale, environmental concerns and state regulations.

Brad Gill, executive director of IOGA-NY opened the meeting by reminding residents that drilling is not new to NY State. "There have been over 75,000 wells drilled since 1821, and 14,000 of those wells are active and producing gas at this time," he said.

According to Gill, the companies drilling in NY have an excellent track record. "We're not having any problems like they are in other areas," he said, referring to reports of contaminated drinking water caused by drilling in other parts of the country.

After explaining the size and potential reserve held in the Marcellus shale, Gill talked about the process of horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing (fracking). Using PowerPoint slides and video he explained how cement is pushed through the borehole and up the steel casing to isolate the well bore from groundwater. "The cement casing prevents contamination of your freshwater aquifer," Gill said.

Gill also explained that horizontal fracking will occur in stages. After the horizontal bore is completed, the casing is perforated – holes are punched through the steel casing using explosives. Then a mix of water, sand and chemicals is forced through the perforations under high pressure, fracturing the shale. About 1,000 feet of horizontal bore is fracked at a time, and according to Gill the Marcellus bores will be somewhere between 2,000 to 3,000 feet long.

"So the fracking will be done in two to three stages," Gill said, "over a period of weeks or months."

Fracking Chemicals

A number of people raised concerns about chemicals used in the fracking process, and two residents asked about one specific chemical: hexavalent chromium. Fortuna spokesman Mark Scheuerman would not say whether his company uses any particular chemical, noting that Fortuna discloses their chemicals to both DEC (NY) and DEP (PA).

"The DEC will not grant a permit without knowing what the components are and their percentage in the [frack] fluids," Scheuerman said.

David Palmerton, a petroleum geologist and technical consultant, provided a summary of fracking chemicals most used in Marcellus shale. In addition to the product names, he noted the hazardous components, how much was typically present in the frack fluid, and which company supplied the chemicals.

Drilling operators don't specify which chemicals they want; instead they ask for a mix that fulfills a certain function, such as "friction reduction". But, Scheuerman said, "We don't buy blind. We understand what is going into the well." He emphasized that the permit owner is responsible for everything that goes on at a well site as well as anything that goes down the well.

Disposal Issues

"If you're using 3 million gallons of water to frack a well, that's 4500 gallons of other chemicals," said one man. "Where does it all go? The sewage treatment plants can't remove all of those chemicals."

Palmerton listed three ways to deal with frack wastewater: treatment plants, underground injection wells, and recycling. He agreed that given the chemicals and chlorides, well wastewater is not something a normal sewage treatment plant can handle. Unless it's pre-treated, he added, pointing out that the wastewater could be diluted first before sending it through a wastewater treatment facility.

Blame DEC for No Drilling

"So why is NY state not allowing us to drill," asked one landowner? After explaining that DEC has been charged with the "monumental task" of evaluating horizontal drilling, and pledging their support of DEC's efforts, the industry representatives laid the blame for the lack of drilling on DEC.

"Under the Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS), it takes about 30 days to get a permit for drilling a Trenton-Black River Well," said Scheuerman. Without the SGEIS for Marcellus, he explained that it would take about 410 days to complete a site-specific Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for each well.

The lack of a streamlined permitting system effectively paralyzes an operator, Scheuerman said. "Waiting 400 days for a permit puts us at a competitive disadvantage."