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TUESDAY, JUNE 22, 2010



Economy forcing schools to tap reserves

BY ERIN L. NISSLEY
STAFF WRITER

For months, Abington Heights School Superintendent Michael Mahon, Ph.D., has been occupied with a calculator and pages of financial projections.

School board members resisted a tax hike for 2010-11, but balancing the budget any other way proved nearly

impossible. Eventually, school district officials presented a budget of \$44.1 million that includes a 2-mill tax increase and a \$1.4 million deficit. The budget also eliminates four teaching positions and puts off replacing some text-

books and upgrading computer equipment. The school board will vote on the final budget Wednesday.

Abington Heights is not alone when it comes to school budget woes. School districts collectively lost \$343 million in local revenues because

of the recession, according to a survey this spring by the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials and the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators. Two-thirds of the state's school districts are planning to cut teaching staff in 2010-11, and 69 percent will be dipping into reserve funds to balance the 2010-11 budgets, the

survey also found. Western Wayne, Lakeland, Mountain View, Dunmore, Old Forge, Riverside and Wallenpaupack Area are among the Northeast Pennsylvania school districts that are planning to use money from reserves to stay in the black. Lackawanna Trail might also use \$350,000 from reserves to balance its budget if the

school board rejects a proposal to increase its millage rate, said the district's business manager, David Homish.

Using reserve funds is extremely risky, warned Jay Himes, executive director of the PASBO, since there are concerns about soaring pension contributions and cuts

Please see **SCHOOLS**, Page A8

Treating predators draining budgets

States using 'civil commitments' see costs soar to \$96G per year per offender.

BY MARTIGA LOHN
ASSOCIATED PRESS

MOOSE LAKE, Minn. — Keeping sex offenders locked up in treatment after they finish their prison sentences emerged as a popular get-tough tactic in the 1990s, when states were flush with cash. But the costs have soared far beyond what anyone envisioned.

An Associated Press analysis found that the 20 states with so-called "civil commitment" programs will spend nearly \$500 million this year alone to confine and treat 5,200 offenders still considered too dangerous to put back on the streets.

The annual costs per offender topped out at \$175,000 in New York and \$173,000 in California, and averaged \$96,000 a year, about double what it would cost to send them to an Ivy League university. In some states, like Minnesota, sex offender treatment costs more than five times more than keeping offenders in prison. And those estimates do not include the considerable legal expenses necessary to commit someone.

The programs have created a political quandary for lawmakers who desperately

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INSIDE

Board changes school dress code

The Scranton School Board on Monday unanimously changed the dress code for the city's two high schools, taking sharper aim at skinny jeans, hooded sweatshirts and clothing that's deemed "gang-related." Local, A3

Spill claims chief vows quick action

Kenneth Feinberg, the administrator of a \$20 billion fund to compensate Gulf oil spill victims, pledged to get money to claimants as quickly as possible. A12

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AN OCEAN OF TROUBLE

Drillers struggle to safely move, store and treat millions of gallons of toxic water at each of thousands of wells



MICHAEL J. MULLEN / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A drilling rig bores into the natural gas-rich Marcellus Shale from a pad in Springville on May 21.

Operators still refining process

BY LAURA LEGERE
STAFF WRITER

HOPEWELL TWP. —

Range Resources dug a pit the size of a football field in the grassy acres just beyond June Chappel's property line last year, yards from the pen where she keeps her beagles and past the trees that shade the porch on her family's small southwestern Pennsylvania home.

Range used it, at first, to store the fresh water needed to produce gas from the seven Marcellus Shale natural gas wells it drilled next door.

But when the company began to fill it with the salt- and metals-laden waste fluids that came back up from the wells, Mrs. Chappel found odors like that of gasoline and kerosene forced her inside. The rising dew left a greasy film on her windows, she said, and one November day a white dust fell over the yard.

She called the company to complain about the smell, and workers came

to skim booms across the pit, sopping up odor-causing residue and bacteria. Throughout all of it, her husband, David, was inside the house, sick with and later dying of cancer at age 54.

"We've gone without," she said in January, standing by the pit with a hood over her head and her beagles nearby in coats. "We don't have a lot here. Now, I feel like it's ruined."

Like the wastewater pits increasingly used by the gas industry in Pennsylvania — the largest of which can hold the equivalent of 22 Olympic-

Continued on Page A6

Chemicals used can be mystery

BY LAURA LEGERE
STAFF WRITER

Three times on two days in September, diluted chemicals used to coax natural gas from the Marcellus Shale spilled from broken pipes and hoses in Susquehanna County and leaked into a wetland and creek.

Safety documents kept at the well site for the concentrated fluid, a Halliburton product that lowers the friction of water, listed two ingredients with generic names and no unique chemical identification numbers.

The documents, which are meant to detail a product's hazards, did not specify the chemicals in the fluid

and provided virtually none of the information environmental regulators needed to evaluate the spills.

Instead, before inspectors with the state Department of Environmental Protection could begin to determine the extent of the contamination in the soil and stream, they asked Halliburton if they could take a sample of the raw gel in order to track down its chemical fingerprint — an analysis that was not finalized until more than two weeks after the first spill.

The prolonged investigation into the spills, which is detailed in more than 100 pages of DEP documents reviewed by The Times-Tribune, shows the stakes of a push in Congress and in several states to force drilling companies to fully disclose the chemicals they use to break apart gas-bearing rock often a mile underground.

To release the gas from

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Mundy: No new drilling for year

Legislator says the gas industry is moving too fast.

BY BOB KALINOWSKI
STAFF WRITER

JACKSON TWP. — Standing at a reservoir that provides drinking water to 30,000 residents in Luzerne County, state Rep. Phyllis Mundy, D-120, Kingston, on Monday called for a one-year moratorium on new natural gas drilling permits in Pennsylvania.

"We are allowing this industry to move ahead too fast," Ms. Mundy said from

the Huntsville Reservoir in front of about 75 concerned citizens. "We need to take a step back and give ourselves the necessary time to do this right. The risks of doing it wrong are simply too great and long-lasting."

Ms. Mundy plans to introduce the moratorium proposal later this week in Harrisburg, along with two other bills designed to protect drinking water from contamination due to Marcellus Shale gas drilling.

One bill would prohibit gas companies from drilling within 2,500 feet of a primary source of public drinking

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Teacher charged with sex with teen

BY JEREMY G. BURTON
STAFF WRITER

After two months of investigation, a Scranton High School teacher has been charged with having a sexual relationship with a 17-year-old male student.

Joseph P. Voyt, 33, of 613 Beech St., was arraigned Friday on a single count of corruption of minors, which is a first-degree misdemeanor. He was released on \$25,000 unsecured bail and scheduled for a preliminary hearing Monday.

Mr. Voyt is accused of having oral sex with the teenage boy after they watched a movie and ate dinner together at the Shoppes at Montage in November.

The alleged abuse did not rise to a more serious charge of involuntary deviate sex because the boy was not forced and he was older than 16, Deputy District Attorney Maryann Grippo said.

Mr. Voyt faces up to five

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'THE WARMER IT GETS, THE MORE PUTRID IT'S GOING TO GET'

Spokesman for Range Resources gas drilling company speaking about wastewater containment ponds at a public meeting in Washington County

FROM PAGE A1

size swimming pools full of contaminated fluid — the problem of what to do with the liquid waste from Marcellus Shale drilling is enormous.

The average Marcellus Shale well requires 4 million gallons of water mixed with sand and chemicals to break apart — or hydraulically fracture — the rock formation and release the gas.

About 1 million gallons of that fluid, now saturated with the salts, metals and naturally occurring radiation that had been trapped in the shale, returns to the surface to be treated, diluted, reused or pumped underground in deep disposal wells.

There has been significant progress in determining what exactly is in the waste and how to reuse it over the last two years — from when the state's environmental regulatory agency belatedly discovered that drillers were sending the fluids to publicly owned sewer systems incapable of treating it, to last week, when the state Independent Regulatory Review Commission endorsed strict restrictions on how much of the waste can be discharged into Pennsylvania's streams.

There has also been a surge in entrepreneurial activity from companies proposing to treat the waste, which can be up to 10 times saltier than seawater.

Locally, Scranton attorney John Minora is helping the Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority look for companies interested in designing, building and operating a treatment system adjacent to the Hanover Twp. authority that would blend the salty waste with the sewer plant's treated flow and then be reused by drillers to fracture new wells.

A use for acid mine water?

State Rep. Jim Wansacz, D-114, Old Forge, has been working with a Texas-based company that wants to capture, treat and sell acid mine drainage to the gas industry even as it cleans the constant, poisonous flow into the Lackawanna River, either at the Old Forge borehole or at another major discharge point in Dupont.

And two companies, Wyoming Somerset Regional Water Resources Corp. and North Branch Processing, have applied to build new gas wastewater treatment facilities in Lemon Twp. and Eaton Twp. in Wyoming County, both of which could be permitted only if they removed enough salt to make the finished flow safe for people to drink.

But even as the state tries to push the stricter treatment standards into law, there are not enough treatment plants in Pennsylvania to remove the salt from the more than a half-million gallons of wastewater that is produced from Marcellus Shale drilling every day.

Those challenges raise what Conrad Dan Volz, director of the Center for Healthy Environments and Communities at the University of Pittsburgh, said is the most obvious of the unanswered questions about the current scale of Marcellus Shale gas production in the state: "Why would we ever start doing this drilling in this kind of intensive way if we didn't have some way to handle and properly dispose of the brine waters?"

Promise, problems with recycling

The problematic pit behind Mrs. Chappel's home was also part of a pioneering development in the early life of Marcellus Shale gas extraction.

In October, Range Resources was the first company in



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An aerial view shows June Chappel's property in southwestern Pennsylvania. The huge area in the foreground is the Range Resources wastewater containment pond that became such a problem. Her house is to the left.

On the Web

Visit our online databases of local gas leases and DEP violations at thetimes-tribune.com/gas

the commonwealth to claim to be able to reuse all of the waste that flowed back from a well after it was hydraulically fractured. Using the pits, called centralized impoundments, Range discovered that it could dilute Marcellus Shale wastewater with fresh water and reuse it in the next well.

The seemingly simple solution had a dramatic impact: As Range doubled the number of gas wells it drilled between 2008 and 2009, it cut the amount of water it needed to discharge in half because of its reuse program, a spokesman said.

The company shared the information with the other Marcellus operators, and now 60 percent of the wastewater produced in the state is being reused, according to the Marcellus Shale Coalition, a cooperative of the state's Marcellus drillers.

But recycling alone will not cure the industry of a need to dispose of the waste.

In defining the need for strict discharge rules for Marcellus Shale wastewater in April, the Department of Environmental Protection wrote that even with recycling and reuse, "it is clear that the future wastewater return flows and treatment needs will be substantial."

Because the gas development is so new, it is still unclear how much wastewater will be created immediately and over time by the 50,000 new wells that are expected to be drilled in the next two decades.

The waste that flows back slowly and continuously over the 20- to 30-year life of each gas well could produce 27 tons of salt per year, the department wrote. "Multiply this amount by tens of thousands of Marcellus gas wells, and the potential pollutional effects ... are tremendous."

Recycling using centralized pits also has its downsides, from the intrusive to the dangerous:

- Mrs. Chappel and her neighbors lived with the noxious odors from the pit behind their homes until they hired an attorney and Range agreed to remove it.

- Two of the Marcellus Shale violations for which Range has been cited and fined by DEP have been for failures of the lines that transfer the waste fluids, sometimes up to 7 miles between a wastewater pit and a well site.

- And the potential for the pits to emit chemicals or haz-



MICHAEL J. MULLEN / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A gas drilling rig stands amid the lush green of Springville, Susquehanna County.

ardous elements called volatile organic compounds into the air has been cited in studies in other states and is being monitored by DEP at sites throughout Washington County.

Matt Pitzarella, a Range Resources spokesman, admitted the decision to put the pit behind Mrs. Chappel's house was "not a good choice" and the company has worked hard to correct it, including removing the pit, reclaiming the hill and even painting Mrs. Chappel's house.

The company's eight or nine other impoundments in Washington County were built for longer-term use, he said, in areas farther away from people's homes.

Another Range spokesman at an April meeting with neighbors upset about the pit's smells said the impoundments hold "a lot of hydrocarbons," brine, and bacteria "from the water just sitting out there" and that can create odors.

"The warmer it gets, the more putrid it's going to get," he said.

The smell is "not dangerous or harmful. It's annoying."

But complaints of odors from pits helped spur DEP to conduct an air quality study around gas well sites in the region that is expected to be completed this month.

And in its review of the environmental implications of Marcellus Shale gas drilling, New York state deter-

mined that the threat posed by the pits may go far beyond annoyance.

An environmental impact statement under review there describes a "worst case scenario" for hazardous air pollutants — especially methanol used by drillers in fracturing fluids and as an antifreeze — escaping from large wastewater impoundments.

According to the report, a centralized impoundment that holds the wastewater from 10 wells could theoretically release 32.5 tons of methanol into the air each year — meaning it could qualify as a "major" source of toxic air pollutants under federal rules.

Because of the risk of leaks and other failures, New York also proposed to ban the use of such centralized impoundments within the boundaries of its most productive aquifers, which underlie about 15 percent of the state.

Pipes susceptible to leaks

The sheer volume of the wastewater and the number of trucks, pits, pipes and people necessary to move it over often long distances has also increased the probability of leaks and spills, which have already occurred in Pennsylvania. Accidents described in DEP documents reviewed by The Times-Tribune show that the above-

ground lines used to pipe the wastewater to and from impoundments and tanks are susceptible to leaks, even when companies take care to prevent them.

In October, an elbow joint came unglued in a PVC line carrying diluted wastewater from one of Range's pits and spilled about 10,500 gallons into a high-quality stream, killing about 170 small fish and salamanders.

According to Range, the company successfully tested the line with fresh water in the week before the wastewater transfer to make sure it could hold the pressure. It was the second transfer line failure for the company in five months.

In a separate incident, a water transfer line used by Chesapeake Appalachia in Bradford County failed five times in five places over five days in December. On one occasion, the pipe burst where it had been weakened from being dragged on the ground.

Another time it failed because of a faulty weld, and another because bolts were loose on a valve.

In correspondence with DEP, Chesapeake said it was its policy to transfer only fresh water in its above-ground lines and to use only a more expensive "fused poly pipe" to minimize the risk of spills.

But an estimated 67,000 total gallons of the water did spill and DEP tests of the

water found that it was not fresh. Instead, it had elevated levels of salts, barium and strontium — indicators of Marcellus wastewater that the company suspected may have mixed with its fresh water in one of its contractor's tanks, which may have been improperly cleaned between uses.

Brian Grove, Chesapeake's director of corporate development, said the incident did not pose a threat to the public and did not result in any negative environmental impact. The company has since adopted new procedures for handling, storing and transporting water, he said, and held a meeting with all of its employees and contractors to reiterate its "commitment to safety and environmental stewardship."

Scott Perry, the director of DEP's Oil and Gas Bureau, said the above-ground pipelines might be addressed in upcoming revisions to the state's oil and gas regulations, which may also include an evaluation of the construction standards for centralized impoundments and other elements of the industry's handling of wastewater.

The current regulatory standard for the pipelines is that they cannot leak, he said.

"Maybe that's good enough," he said. "There's an absolute prohibition against getting a single drop of it on the ground."

He emphasized that the regulatory agency has to find a way to permit the pipelines so it both protects the environment and encourages their use in order to remove excessive truck traffic from rural roads.

"In a practical sense, if you want to eliminate 100,000 trucks, this is the way to do it," he said.

Solution: Move less water

Radisav Vidic, chairman of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Pittsburgh, said a better way to minimize the risk of environmental damage is for companies to stop moving the wastewater so much.

Current industry practice for recycling the waste is to fracture a well and then drive or pipe the water to an impoundment or tanks, over and over, he said, "until they move 6 million gallons of water back and forth" to fracture multiple wells on one pad, creating an opportunity for spills with each trip.

Dr. Vidic is studying how to take the wastewater from one well, mix it with acid mine drainage, and use it to fracture subsequent wells on the same multi-well pad — research that is being funded in part by a grant from the U.S. Department of Energy.

He has found that the sulfates in acid mine drainage — one of the biggest sources of pollution in current and former coal mining regions of the state — interact with problem metals like barium and strontium in the wastewater and turn them into solids that can be discarded.

An obstacle to research, though, is how little some gas companies are willing to collaborate, both with him and each other, to solve the wastewater problem, he said.

"Every company thinks they know it best, and they keep it to themselves, and they think they're going to get a competitive advantage," he said.

"I'm thinking, who cares? We can all sink together because we're hiding the information, or we can all swim together and everybody's going to get a little bit rich in the process, not filthy rich."

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W.Va. regulators scramble to keep pace

Surge in drilling leaves state short on inspectors, policies

BY VICKI SMITH
ASSOCIATED PRESS

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. — The number of natural gas wells being permitted in West Virginia's portion of the vast Marcellus Shale field is growing faster than the Department of Environmental Protection's ability to keep pace, Secretary Randy Huffman said.

While the number of permits issued for unconventional drilling operations more than tripled between 2007 and 2009, the number of inspectors increased by only one, DEP records show. Four more inspectors are on the

payroll this year, but Mr. Huffman acknowledges 18 people are not enough to handle not only more than 1,000 new Marcellus wells, but also tens of thousands of traditional, shallow gas wells.

"We simply do not have the number of people necessary to do the job," Mr. Huffman said in an interview with The Associated Press. "It's easy to issue a permit. What I think we're doing is issuing permits faster than we have the ability to keep up with them on the ground."

How to address the shortage of inspectors and how great a workload each inspec-

tor can handle are among the questions the DEP hopes to answer in an ongoing review of its Division of Oil and Gas. Mr. Huffman said he wants the "comprehensive, top-down look" completed within the next few months so he can brief Gov. Joe Manchin by November. He wants to offer any necessary policy changes — and perhaps legislation — by January.

"We've got to give the people in the state a comfort level that ... we're not selling the farm in exchange for the gas," he said.

But Charlie Burd, executive director of the Independent Oil and Gas Association of West Virginia, calls the DEP timeline "very aggressive."

"Any rush to judgment would be a mistake," he cau-

tioned. "It's not like there's some tremendously critical issue out there that should be driving this. I think everyone concerned will be better off if we take our time and do it right as opposed to reacting quickly."

An explosion earlier this month at a gas well site near Moundsville did not trigger the review but verified the need for it, Mr. Huffman said.

Seven workers were injured when Texas-based Union Drilling Inc. drilled through an abandoned coal mine and struck a pocket of methane gas that ignited. The resulting fire burned for five days, and the DEP issued two violations against the permit holder, AB Resources PA LLC of Brecksville, Ohio. The state shut down all AB Resources

operations in the state while it reviews the company's permit compliance.

"We don't know if a new regulatory scheme would have made a bit of difference," Mr. Huffman said.

The Marcellus Shale field is a vast, rich reserve the size of Greece that underlies Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and New York. The gas is locked in tightly compacted rock a mile underground, and freeing it requires unconventional horizontal drilling technologies and vast amounts of water.

How to handle millions of gallons of chemical-tainted wastewater remains a question, but Scott Mandirola of the DEP's Division of Water and Waste Management said most companies now realize

it makes environmental and economic sense to recycle. Some larger companies have told the DEP they're recycling 95 percent or more because it's cheaper than buying, hauling and disposing of water with each new well, Mr. Mandirola said.

Still, water concerns remain part of the review.

Mr. Huffman said widespread change in the state's regulatory structure may not be necessary, but the DEP does need a better way to fund inspectors, whose salaries come from permit fees.

In 2007, the DEP issued 147 new permits for Marcellus wells. In 2008, the number jumped to 387, and then to 397 last year. As of June 1, 122 permits had been issued so far this year.

CHEMICALS: Few studies done to show risks to human health

FROM PAGE A1

the Marcellus Shale, companies inject millions of gallons of water, silica sand and chemicals into the formation at high pressure to break apart, or hydraulically fracture, the rock. Full disclosure of those hydraulic fracturing chemicals, which make up about 1 percent of what is injected underground, has been at the heart of the drilling debate.

The precise identity and concentration of the chemicals is considered chief among the unknowns by some researchers, landowners and lawmakers who have found that vague identification of the chemicals interferes with spill investigations, emergency response and drinking-water testing.

It is the subject of legislation proposed in Congress and in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, and it is addressed in updated well reporting rules proposed by the Department of Environmental Protection that will likely go into effect this fall.

'Well known, well understood'

The natural gas industry says it already offers full disclosure.

The national organization Energy In Depth, the state-based Marcellus Shale Coalition, and individual company spokesmen consistently cite a list of 33 different fracturing chemicals DEP posts online to prove that complete information about the chemicals is readily available to the public.

"The entire universe of chemical information is out there," said Chris Tucker, a spokesman for Energy in Depth.

DEP officials have repeatedly maintained they know what is in the hydraulic fracturing fluids because companies must submit safety documents, called Material Safety Data Sheets, for the chemicals they use at their well sites as part of the permitting process — documents like those kept at the spill site in Susquehanna County.

"These chemicals are well known, well understood, highly diluted when they're being used, but (data on them are) nevertheless available."

Kathryn Klaber
Executive director, Marcellus Shale Coalition

In May, DEP Secretary John Hanger testified at hearings that the safety sheets reveal "all the chemicals" used by the fracturing contractors. He said the only unknown is the exact proportions of the chemicals that are used, which the companies protect as trade secrets.

Kathryn Klaber, executive director of the Marcellus Shale Coalition, said the industry is "absolutely supportive of full disclosure" and already offers it through the Material Safety Data Sheets.

"These chemicals are well known, well understood, highly diluted when they're being used, but nevertheless available."

DEP not ready to make 'leap of faith'

But the analysis of the fracturing gel that spilled at the Heitsman farm in Dimock Twp. on Sept. 16 and 22 identified 10 compounds, none of which is included on DEP's online summary of chemicals drilling companies told the department they use to fracture natural gas wells in the Marcellus Shale.

The list also does not include the Halliburton product used during the spill and does not name the generic ingredient "paraffinic solvent" listed by Halliburton on the chemical safety document.

One of the chemicals DEP identified in the gel — 1,2,4 trimethylbenzene — was found in the soil in amounts above the state's health limit. Several other chemicals were found in a swale and the stream after the spill.

Those chemicals, like many used in hydraulic fracturing, have undergone few studies to determine their risks to human health. Because Pennsylvania has

not developed rules on the limits of those chemicals that are safe in streams, DEP instructed Cabot Oil and Gas Corp., the driller deemed responsible for the spill, to determine how toxic they are to aquatic life and humans.

In an e-mail response to questions about DEP's process of investigating the spills, the agency would not address whether its investigation would have been expedited or changed if inspectors knew the precise chemical composition of the gel at the time of the incidents, calling it a "speculative question."

The department did state that it takes samples "at many spill sites to confirm or identify the material spilled."

Records from the investigation also show that even as state regulators publicly declare the usefulness of the Material Safety Data Sheets for characterizing the drilling chemicals and their risks, officials with the department have expressed doubts about the sheets' reliability.

After the first fracturing fluid spill on the Heitsman site, Cabot submitted a revised safety sheet to DEP saying that although a first document said the product was a potential carcinogen, follow-up tests by Halliburton showed it posed no cancer risk.

In an internal e-mail, a regional DEP manager said the department was "not ready to make that leap of faith" until it finished its own lab analysis of the fluid, "especially in light of the facts" that the sheet classifies the gel as a combustible liquid "and our UV-IR scan showed it contains diesel fuel" — a component Cabot has denied was in the fluid.

Disclosure and regulation

Told of the spill investigation, Ms. Klaber said

Material Safety Data Sheets are "not perfect" but have long served as a "very important data point" in many industries.

"If it were so bad, we should go to OSHA, not the industry, to fix it," she said, referring to the federal job safety agency that regulates the forms.

She added that the industry "wholeheartedly" supports the increased disclosure rules put forward by DEP, which would require drillers to report the names and total volume of chemicals used to fracture a well within 30 days after it is completed.

The new rules will not require drillers to report the volume of each chemical used, DEP's Oil and Gas Bureau director has said.

Last year, U.S. Sen. Bob Casey joined with three other members of Congress to introduce legislation that would bring the hydraulic fracturing process under the regulatory control of the federal Environmental Protection Agency and would also force drilling companies to disclose all of the chemicals they use during the process.

The oil and gas industry says the legislation, if passed, would cripple domestic gas production because they say it amounts to a ban on hydraulic fracturing — the technique that has made unconventional sources of gas, like the Marcellus Shale, accessible and affordable for the first time.

When similar disclosure requirements were considered and later rejected in another energy bill in May, the industry pushed back.

Lee Fuller, executive director of Energy in Depth, wrote to the committee chairman saying the reporting requirements could squelch companies' efforts to develop less toxic fracturing fluids.

"The release of information to competitors — both foreign and domestic — on initiatives such as the development of 'green' chemicals could have the perverse effect of forcing companies to cut their investment in this

important research, or abandon it altogether," he wrote.

Mr. Casey said his bill, called the FRAC Act, is not going to stop hydraulic frac-

turing. "It's about disclosure and regulation, and we need more of both," he said.

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MUNDY: Eachus studying bills

FROM PAGE A1

water, such as the Huntsville and Ceasetown reservoirs in the Back Mountain and Lake Scranton. The current distance is only 100 feet, Ms. Mundy said.

The other bill calls for a resolution to urge Congress to repeal a provision in the federal Safe Drinking Water Act, known as the "Halliburton loophole," that exempts oil and gas drilling industries from restrictions on hydraulic fracturing near drinking-water sources.

The Huntsville Reservoir is the drinking-water source for 30,000 people in Luzerne County, and the nearby Ceasetown reservoir serves 70,000 residents. Much of the land surrounding the reservoirs has already been leased to gas drilling companies, Ms. Mundy said.

"The cost and the effect on human health if either or both of these reservoirs were

to become contaminated ... is unimaginable," Ms. Mundy said.

More than 3,100 gas drilling permits have already been issued by the state Department of Environmental Protection, including four in Luzerne County. Ms. Mundy conceded her proposed legislation would not affect permits already granted. She thinks a moratorium will allow state officials to monitor the industry before it expands further and "would allow us to recover ground lost while the industry has gathered momentum."

"The current economic climate makes us very vulnerable to promises of easy money and good jobs. But we must ask ourselves — will this economic boom come at the expense of our infrastructure, our quality of life, our water supply, our safety, and our health?" Ms. Mundy said. State Rep. Eddie Day Pash-

inski, D-121, Wilkes-Barre, attended the news conference and said he will support Ms. Mundy's bills.

A spokesman for House Majority Leader Todd Eachus, D-116, Hazleton, said Mr. Eachus wanted to review the proposed legislation before deciding on whether to support a moratorium.

"Rep. Eachus supports Rep. Mundy's passion and commitment to protecting the public and environment from the dangers of natural gas drilling. He stands with her in making sure they are held accountable," said Eachus spokesman Bill Thomas.

Tom Jiunta, a member of Gas Drilling Awareness Coalition, said many legislators openly admit they have concerns about the current regulation of the gas industry, but don't do anything to cease the expansion.

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