

## **"St Andrew....a reasonable hydrofracking policy"**

Governor Andrew Cuomo's hydrofracking policy is anything but "reasonable". It would open up 85% of New York State's Southern Tier to the heavily industrialized impacts of natural gas (methane) extraction from the Marcellus and Utica Shales that can lie several thousand feet below surface, and turn a farmland and forested landscape into bleak, industrial areas.

The over 1000-page Preliminary Revised Draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement 2011 issued by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) on June 30th, to be completed in August with studies on the "community and socioeconomic impacts of high-volume fracturing", is replete with regulations to be conscientiously adhered to and enforced by DEC. But, to be realistic, the DEC, over the last few years, has been severely emasculated with over 500 layoffs due to budgetary deficiencies. There is little hope that the necessary funding will be available to fill these positions. How can the DEC possibly issue permits and conscientiously supervise the several thousand applications that will be pouring in each year?

As one example among many, applications will need to be administered for hydrofracking permits within 500 feet of private wells of which there are thousands. Five hundred feet is ridiculously close when we consider that, at a minimum, 100 feet are required between a passive septic system and a private well, and that the impacts from spacing units where the drilling takes place, together with all the heavy equipment needed to support it, are immeasurably more severe than a simple septic-well system. There will be no permits issued within 2,000 feet of a public drinking water supply; private wells are just as vulnerable.

A glaring omission is that there is no requirement that private wells be tested prior to hydrofracking in their vicinity. This means that the burden of proof of well contamination due to hydrofracking is shifted to the owner.

In a June 11, 2011 article by Ian Urbina in The NY Times, the author describes the conflicting views of the future of gas drilling by the US Department of Energy (D.O.E) and the United States Energy Information Administration (E.I.D.), a division of D.O.E., whose reports are reputedly based on solid scientific information. In contrast to the D.O.E's forecasts of a "boom in drilling", internal memoranda within the E.I.D. refer to shale gas as a "gold rush" and compare it to "previous bubbles, in housing and technology stocks...".

The situation is reminiscent of NASA in the 1980s when it was administered by two conflicting bureaucracies: the managers and the engineers. The former were in charge of operations, and estimated the risk of a disaster to

be one in a hundred thousand missions. The latter, basing their estimate on science alone, put the risk at one in a hundred missions. The Challenger disaster in 1986 showed that the scientific estimate was closer to the truth. The Nobel Prize-winning physicist, Richard Feynman, who sat on the committee investigating the disaster, and who blamed frozen O-rings as a simple but major reason for what happened, summed it up by saying: "For a successful technology, reality must take precedence over public relations, for nature cannot be fooled."

Wise words that we should take to heart.

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