

# Radiation-fracking link sparks swift reactions

**Don Hopey, Pittsburgh (Pa.) Post-Gazette, 3-5-11**

Reports this week of high radiation levels in Marcellus Shale waste fracking fluids and weak regulation of the industry have turned on a spigot of action by federal and state officials.

U.S. Environmental Protection Administrator Lisa Jackson visited the agency's Region III office in Philadelphia Friday to ascertain the radiation issue will be addressed in an ongoing national study on the drinking water impacts of hydraulic fracturing, an industrial process used in shale gas development.

The EPA will seek data from the state Department of Environmental Protection and the drilling industry on radioactivity in the fracking fluid "flowback" water.

In a statement released following Ms. Jackson's meeting, the EPA said that while the national study progresses, it "will not hesitate to take any steps under the law to protect Americans whose health may be at risk," including enforcement actions to ensure that drinking water supplies are protected.

After a well is drilled, millions of gallons of water, sand and chemical additives are pumped deep underground under high pressure to crack the shale formation and release the gas it contains. As much as 20 percent of that fracking fluid waste returns to the surface with the gas and contains a variety of radioactive minerals from the shale.

The New York Times reported that hydraulic fracturing wastewater at 116 of 179 deep gas wells in the state contained high levels of radiation and its effect on public drinking water supplies is unknown because water suppliers are required to conduct tests of radiation only sporadically.

A number of public water suppliers, including the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority and Pennsylvania American Water Co. said this week that they would voluntarily test for radiation.

State Rep. Camille Bud George, D-Clearfield, announced he will introduce legislation calling for mandatory and independent radiation testing of all public water supplies that could potentially be affected by Marcellus Shale drilling wastewater discharges, and requiring the drilling and gas companies to pay for the testing.

State Sen. Jim Ferlo, D-Highland Park, renewed his call for a moratorium on drilling and said he will introduce legislation to toughen state Oil and Gas Act regulations on well siting around residences and streams, and impose a severance tax on Marcellus Shale gas production. Gov. Tom Corbett opposes such a tax.

"A moratorium is the most reasonable approach, especially in light of recent revelations about serious threats to our drinking water supply," Mr. Ferlo said. "This bill provides a framework for updating and improving regulations, as well as retaining the economic benefits of Marcellus Shale development."

In a statement issued Thursday, the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, one of the most mainstream of the state's environmental organizations, called on Mr. Corbett to drop plans to open more of the state's forests and parks to Marcellus gas drilling.