

Women Voters Make Fracking Statement

After taking over 21,000 public comments on the revised draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement, more than on any issue, the state Department of Environmental Conservation must get to work on finalizing regulations around horizontal drilling and high-volume hydraulic fracturing.

The St. Lawrence County unit of the League of Women Voters joined tens of thousands of other interested citizens and organizations in submitting comments on the regulations that will govern how hydrofracking takes place in the state, if the DEC allows it to move forward.

According to Joseph Martens, the state environmental commissioner, "if high-volume hydraulic fracturing moves forward in New York, it will move forward with the strictest standards in the nation to ensure New York's drinking water and other natural resources are thoroughly protected."

The League cosponsored a number of educational programs in the area on the topic of shale gas drilling. The most notable of which was to bring Deborah Rogers to Potsdam from her home state of Texas to discuss the finances behind shale oil drilling, the environmental and health problems associated with it, and what New Yorkers might expect if fracking is permitted to go forward.

The local League unit decided to write to the DEC expressing concerns in a number of areas. These included protection of land owner rights in regard to air quality and water safety with pre and post-drilling water testing and concerns about the chemicals added to the water using in hydrofracking for toxicity and carcinogens.

Additional concerns included the damage to land property values for landowners on or near drill sites. In particular, the League noted the need for remediation by the gas companies for all

damages done to private property as result of drilling, with independent audits and remediation or compensation at the expense of the drilling company to repay landowners for damages.

Similarly, drilling companies must be responsible for additional burdens placed on localities and communities who will be under the burden of increased expense due to drilling. Increased costs due to drilling for highway maintenance, fire and police protection, or other services like health care must be the responsibility of the energy companies.

The issue of safe and adequate waste disposal was dressed in the letter, in particular regarding the disposal of toxic wastes and safe industrial treatment of spent hydrofracking fluids. Currently the state does not have a single waste water treatment plant capable of taking the toxins out of fracking fluid.

The League recommended the use of unique chemical

tracers so that each well and its fluid could be later identified in the event of contamination or leakage. A related recommendation is requiring drillers to have sufficient bonding to ensure that any adverse impacts of the drilling operation will be taken care of. Without such bonding, efforts to obtain financial remuneration by residents or communities could be tied up in years of costly negotiation.

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization open to women and men, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

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