



Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee

Senator Mary Jo White Chairman

Patrick Henderson, Executive Director

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Letter to the Editor
Centre Daily Times
3400 East College Avenue
State College, PA 16801

Dear Editor:

I read with interest and significant concern the letter submitted by Katherine Watt, a member of the Centre County Natural Gas Task Force, regarding the potential impact of Marcellus Shale natural gas development.

While I respect Ms. Watt's prerogative to simply oppose natural gas drilling, it does appear shortsighted. Natural gas is a cleaner, abundant fuel available right here in Pennsylvania. We cannot talk about reducing our reliance on foreign energy sources without committing to developing our own indigenous natural resources. The Centre Area Transportation Authority, which has converted its entire bus fleet to natural gas, is a model for what the future in transportation may look like. This natural gas has to come from somewhere.

Ms. Watt makes several statements which are neither fair nor accurate. Her statement that DEP staffers can and do destroy communities and ecosystems is an outrageous indictment of the hundreds of dedicated employees who pride themselves in ensuring that Pennsylvania's air, land and water resources are protected. Pennsylvania has some of the strictest well drilling, casing and construction standards in the nation. Drilling operators must obtain numerous permits and authorizations and undergo inspections throughout this activity, from drilling and constructing a well, to handling any wastewater and reclaiming the site after drilling is completed. They must ensure that no contamination of air, land or water occurs. In instances where an operator fails to abide by these rules, DEP has significant authority to hold an operator civilly and criminally liable. DEP has not been shy about exercising this authority.

There is also no evidence that fracking a deep well, as is done to access Marcellus Shale gas, is contributing to aquifer depletion or degrading water quality. Most gas is more than a mile below the surface, maintaining several thousand feet between the shale and the aquifer. DEP, along with 18 other states, certified to the Ground Water Protection Council last year that they have no instances of fracking resulting in any water quality problems where this activity is occurring. President Obama's EPA drinking water quality chief recently provided similar testimony before Congress.

People have legitimate concerns about the level and scope of natural gas drilling that is occurring in their community. They have the right to ask questions and expect answers. This is a major change in many communities across Pennsylvania, and no one wants to see their quality of life negatively affected, or their environmental resources mismanaged and mistreated. But baseless claims that indict all drilling activity as well as the environmental professionals who protect our natural resources do not serve your readers well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Jo White".

Mary Jo White, Chairman
Senate Environmental Resources
& Energy Committee