

# Gas Drilling in OH Brings Jobs, Worries

JULIE CARR SMYTH, Associated Press



COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — After a childhood spent moving around, Patti Gorcheff vowed that she'd never uproot her daughter. But she says wastewater disposal in her area from an oil and gas drilling frenzy that's hit Ohio and other states has forced her to change her mind.

She and her husband are selling the family home and fleeing with their 15-year-old before the drinking water becomes contaminated, said Gorcheff, 56, of rural North Lima in northeastern Ohio. She's heard the accounts from neighboring Pennsylvania of contaminant-laced water being discharged into rivers — and of fears there that, despite officials' assurances, drinking water might be harmed.

"I've never been so afraid," she said. "They're taking advantage of us because we're one of the poorest areas in the country. We have to move out of this area, we just have to.

"I just don't know what else to do at this point. I just don't trust these people."

The drilling activity promises huge opportunity for eager energy companies and, says Republican Gov. John Kasich, for Ohio's struggling economy. The vast Marcellus and Utica shale formations are already paying off in thousands of wells in Pennsylvania and West Virginia, bringing great wealth to landowners and jobs throughout the region.

"We're talking about a generation who have lived in poverty and this is an

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opportunity to pull them out," Kasich told The Associated Press in an interview.

What he views as an opportunity and Gorcheff and other residents view with skepticism is the 5 billion barrels of recoverable oil underneath them, making Ohio the latest battleground between companies eager to profit off of the oil and landowners who want a more measured look at the potential impact.

Even before Kasich took office in January, his team worked on a strategy to exploit the energy riches embedded in the Marcellus and deeper Utica shale formations under eastern Ohio.

He's taken his welcome message directly to Chevron, Exxon Mobil, Shell and Chesapeake, and in April, Ohio opened its parks and other public lands to drilling as part of the push.

The state issued a single permit for drilling in the Utica Shale in 2009, and two permits in 2010. As of Dec. 4, 131 permits were issued this year, records showed. A similar trend is occurring in the state's less pervasive Marcellus Shale deposits, where six permits were issued between 2006 and 2010, and 10 have been issued this year.

A combined 87 of those permits are for hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, a drilling technique where chemical-laced water is blasted into the ground to break the shale and free oil and gas. Twenty such wells have been drilled.

Kasich said he is pursuing regulations that protect residents, public health and the environment while encouraging business growth, and he's warned companies that destroying Ohio's environment is not an option.

"We want to make sure we get this right," he said. "We can't have wildcatters just coming in here and stripping us of what we have in the state and leaving."

Ohio residents like Tish O'Dell of the Cleveland suburb of Broadview Heights are skeptical. O'Dell said many of her neighbors were vulnerable to deals offered by lease buyers, known as landmen, because of the down economy. One woman, she said, had no idea such destruction would occur.

"One day, they started clearing trees behind her house," O'Dell said. "She looks out her kitchen window and all she sees is these three wells. This was going to be her dream home."

Some people are trying to form a group they'll call Mothers Against Drilling in Our Neighborhoods to organize protests and raise awareness, O'Dell said. The 86 traditional wells now permitted in the 13 square miles community have meant clogged roads, downed trees, spoiled views and environmental worries for Broadview Heights' roughly 17,000 residents.

In Greene County in southwest Ohio, citizen activists turned over a mysterious notebook to Attorney General Mike DeWine this year that appeared to coach lease

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buyers to use deceptive tactics on unsuspecting landowners. DeWine is investigating.

In Youngstown, near Gorcheff's home, the state has installed monitoring equipment to help determine whether a series of minor earthquakes in northeast Ohio are resulting from the deep injection into the earth of chemical- and sand-laced brine that's a byproduct of oil drilling and fracking. An average of 84,000 gallons of the brine is injected into a well near the epicenter of the activity daily, most shipped in through a contract with neighboring Pennsylvania. Ohio also recently agreed to take wastewater from Texas.

State Rep. Nickie Antonio, a suburban Cleveland Democrat, said she doesn't believe Ohio has adequately assessed the potential impacts on groundwater and the environment from such activity because the process is moving so quickly.

"The fact that the wells have been able to move into the suburban communities where the homes are so close to each other, it boggles the mind," she said. "It has to be seen to be believed."

Antonio and fellow Democrats in the Republican-controlled state legislature have pushed bills that call for a moratorium on drilling and require public disclosure of the chemicals used in the process, some of which are known carcinogens.

"It is altogether reasonable, appropriate, and urgent to call a timeout on Ohio's black gold rush," said Jack Shaner, deputy director of the Ohio Environmental Council, one of dozens of groups that signed on to the moratorium proposal.

The proposal has gone nowhere in Ohio. New York has imposed such a moratorium as it assesses the potential environmental impacts.

Several high-profile environmental contamination cases have arisen in neighboring Pennsylvania, one of five states where the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has begun examining drilling sites.

Attorney Sean Moran, who represents oil and gas companies at work in Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia, downplayed the risks.

"The incidents of any environmental problem are extremely rare," he said, noting that unusual events grab headlines. "There's not much of a story in saying — OK, well No. 9,678 was drilled safely, well No. 9,679 ... safely. The things that catch attention are the exceptions."

Kasich said he is working hard to ensure drilling operations are environmentally responsible.

"First of all, it's the right thing to do protect the environment of our state. Second, it's smart business," he said. "If you did this irresponsibly, you would pay the price and in the end would wind up losing the jobs you're trying to create."

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In a letter he sent to CEOs of 44 shale-related companies this spring, Kasich made his case.

"I have high expectations for the positive economic impact that your industry can have for Ohio and I need your commitment to responsible corporate citizenship to make that possible," he wrote.

He called for safe operations that follow the law.

"Ohio won't settle for anything less," he added.

Colleges, universities and business organizations have offered resources to the effort.

The Ohio Chamber of Commerce, which endorsed Kasich in his bid for governor, has commissioned a study on the potential economic impacts of all the shale activity. The report is expected in January.

"There are so many ways this is going to touch our economy: increased lease payments, actual drilling, producers' immediate suppliers, hotels, restaurants, less-expensive energy," said executive vice president Linda Woggon.

Ohio Common Cause, a nonprofit citizen advocacy group, issued a report last month that suggests the industry is also affecting politicians' campaign coffers. Kasich led recipients at the state level, with about \$214,000 in donations, followed by his predecessor, Democrat Ted Strickland, with about \$88,000.

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