

Water Quality OK at 20 Wells in Gas Town

DIMOCK, Pa. (AP) — Testing at 20 more water wells in a northeastern Pennsylvania community at the center of a debate over the safety of natural gas drilling in the Marcellus Shale shows no dangerous levels of contamination, according to a report issued Friday by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The EPA had already tested 11 wells in Dimock, showing the presence of sodium, methane, chromium or bacteria in six of the wells before the results of the latest round of testing.

Three of the newly-tested wells showed methane while one showed barium well above the EPA's maximum level, but a treatment system installed in the well is removing the substance, an EPA spokesman said.

Featured in the documentary "Gasland," the Susquehanna County village of Dimock has been at the center of a fierce debate over drilling, in particular the process of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. The process involves injecting a mixture of water and chemicals deep underground to free trapped natural gas so it can be brought to the surface.

State environmental regulators previously determined that Houston-based Cabot Oil & Gas Corp. contaminated the aquifer underneath homes along Carter Road in Dimock with explosive levels of methane gas, although they later determined the company had met its obligation to provide safe drinking water to residents.

The EPA is still providing drinking water to three homes where prior tests showed contamination. A second round of tests is under way, regulators said.

A group of Dimock residents suing Cabot assert their water is also polluted with drilling chemicals, while others say that the water is clean and the plaintiffs are exaggerating problems with their wells to help their lawsuit.

A Cabot spokesman said in a statement Friday that the "data confirms the earlier EPA finding that levels of contaminants found do not possess a threat to human health and the environment."

"Importantly, the EPA again did not indicate that those contaminants that were detected bore any relationship to oil and gas development in the Dimock area, particularly given the fact that any contaminants are more likely indicative of naturally-occurring background levels or other unrelated activities," the statement said.

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