EPA: Water Is Safe in Drilling Region

KEVIN BEGOS, Associated Press

PITTSBURGH (AP) — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said Wednesday that it has completed tests on drinking water in the northeastern Pennsylvania village of Dimock and has determined it is safe to drink, despite the claims of some residents who say it has been polluted by gas drilling.

The EPA said in a statement that it doesn't plan further tests, and that there's no need to provide residents with alternative supplies of drinking water.

Dimock resident Ray Kemble didn't accept the EPA verdict.

"I don't care what EPA says. The water is still polluted," Kemble said. "Do something about it."

The town became a focus in the debate over hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, when opponents of drilling showed that some residents were able to light their tap water on fire because of high levels of methane gas. But geologists say such contamination can also happen naturally.

Some Dimock residents and anti-drilling groups claimed that Houston-based Cabot Oil & Gas Corp. polluted the local aquifer with methane and toxic chemicals. They have disputed earlier EPA findings that the water was safe.

State environmental regulators previously determined that Cabot contaminated the aquifer underneath homes along Carter Road in Dimock with explosive levels of methane, although they later determined the company had met its obligations under a consent agreement and allowed Cabot to stop delivering bulk and bottled water last fall.

Some had hoped the EPA would be able to settle the dispute.

"Our goal was to provide the Dimock community with complete and reliable information about the presence of contaminants in their drinking water and to determine whether further action was warranted to protect public health," said EPA Regional Administrator Shawn M. Garvin.

But another Dimock resident said EPA's public statements are different from what they tell the area homeowners in private.

"They recommended that we don't drink or use the water, but told us they can't go public with that," said Scott Ely, who added that he plans to proceed with a lawsuit against Cabot.

Cabot said in a statement that the tests confirm that the contaminants don't pose a

threat to human health or the environment, and that its operations in Dimock "have led to significant economic growth in the area, marked by a collaborative relationship with the local community. Cabot will continue to cooperate with federal, state and local officials in using the best and most accurate science to address public concerns."

Kathryn Klaber, president of the Marcellus Shale Coalition, an industry group, said the EPA findings mean "we're now able to close this chapter once and for all."

Shale gas drilling has attracted national attention because advances in technology have unlocked billions of dollars of gas reserves, leading to a boom in production, jobs and profits, as well as concerns about pollution and public health. Shale is a gas-rich rock formation thousands of feet underground, and the gas is freed through fracking, in which large volumes of water, plus sand and chemicals, are injected to break the rock apart.

The Marcellus Shale covers large parts of Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio and West Virginia, and many other shale deposits have been discovered.

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