

Gas Drilling Didn't Foul Northeast Pa. Wells

MICHAEL RUBINKAM, Associated Press

Gas drilling isn't to blame for a high-profile case of methane contamination in northeastern Pennsylvania, state environmental regulators declared Monday, but a homeowner with fouled water vowed to press on and said she doesn't trust the agency.

Anti-fracking celebrities including Yoko Ono and Susan Sarandon had visited the Susquehanna County village of Franklin Forks in January as part of a tour of natural-gas drilling sites. There, the stars met with Matthew and Tammy Manning, who blame the high level of methane in their well water on a natural gas driller, WPX Energy.

But the state Department of Environmental Protection said its 16-month investigation shows WPX isn't responsible for high levels of methane and other contaminants in the private water wells at three homes.

The methane in the residents' wells is naturally occurring shallow gas — possibly from nearby Salt Springs State Park — and not production gas from the Marcellus Shale formation, DEP said. The agency said that samples taken from the wells and from Salt Springs exhibited similar water chemistry, including high levels of barium, iron, chlorides and other contaminants.

"We're pleased that a science-based, fact-finding effort by the state definitively showed that our operations were not responsible for methane migration issues in Susquehanna County," WPX spokeswoman Susan Oliver said.

The company has been paying to have replacement water delivered to the homes. Oliver said no decision has been made about whether the deliveries will continue.

Tammy Manning, who became an outspoken opponent of gas drilling after her well failed in December 2011, said DEP has not determined how the methane showed up in her well. Manning, who is one of the plaintiffs in a federal lawsuit against WPX, said she continues to believe the company is responsible.

"I've said for almost a year and a half that I didn't really put a lot of stock in what (DEP) had to say," Manning said of the agency's determination. "Something happened that caused all this gas to come into our neighborhood."

Industry officials have said the Mannings' well was flooded in 2011 and suffered mechanical failure. Manning pointed out the flood happened three months before the contaminants showed up in her well, and said another homeowner with fouled

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water did not experience flooding.

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