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Interfaith Impact of New York State

STATEMENT ON HYDRAULIC FRACTURING

In August, the New York Senate passed Senate Bill S8129B, an act to suspend hydraulic fracturing until June 1, 2011. The Assembly Bill has not been voted on as of October 17, 2010.

IINYS applauds the Senate for passing this bill with a strong, bi-partisan vote. We urge all concerned citizens to contact their Assembly member as well as the Governor and urge passage of this bill, which is crucial to the continued purity of our drinking water across the state.

Interfaith Impact of NYS is deeply concerned about the highly dangerous chemicals used in the hydraulic fracturing process. We call for the prohibition of the use of toxic, carcinogenic or otherwise harmful chemicals in the fracturing fluids and the use of environmentally safe alternatives.

Background: The Marcellus and Utica shale formations that underlay portions of New York, Pennsylvania and West Virginia serve as a vast reservoir of natural gas. Gas company geologists have known about these gas deposits for years. The spike in oil prices in 2008 made drilling for gas in these shale formations profitable. The momentum to tap into these gas reserves continues.

The shale must be fractured to release the trapped gas. This fracturing is done by injecting a high pressure mixture of water, sand and enabling chemicals. The fractures thus created are held open by the sand grains (proppants), which provide conductive channels for the movement of the gas.

Currently, the natural gas companies are not required by law to disclose all the chemicals used during the fracturing process.

The drilling is done off of well pads. These pads may be from three to five acres in size. Governor Paterson signed legislation permitting multiple wells to be drilled from a single pad. These wells go down to within 500 feet of the shale layer and then are turned horizontally as they enter the shale formation. The waste generated during the drilling process is stored on the pad. Multiple wells from a single pad minimize the total land surface disturbed but increase the waste stored on the pad.

(more)

The New York Department of Environmental Conservation is the agency that reviews and approves drilling permits. This does not include on site monitoring after the permits have been issued. A request for 30 new staff members was stripped out of this year's budget in the face of the state's fiscal situation. The extra staff members were to speed up the permitting process, not conduct on site monitoring.

New York State relies upon natural gas for 24% of its energy needs. Currently this gas comes from Canadian and Gulf Coast sources.

IINYS has the following concerns:

- Natural gas is a fossil fuel. We should be moving away from reliance on fossil fuels and toward renewable energy sources.
- Natural gas development is referred to as an economic development scheme for the areas of NYS over these gas deposits. Is this a boom/bust cycle or is it good long term development?
- Does NYS currently have treatment options for the type and volume of waste produced by hydraulic fracturing?
- Does NYSDEC have sufficient regulatory authority to oversee and monitor drilling on the scale proposed?

Resources: We recommend viewing the documentary film *Gasland* by Josh Fox. *Gasland* explores the hidden costs of natural gas drilling in Pennsylvania, Colorado and Wyoming.

There are many good websites on the issue. Environmental Advocates of New York, www.eany.org, Citizens Campaign for the Environment, www.citizenscampaign.org, and www.catskillmountainkeeper.com are three that you might find helpful.

Call to Action: Currently the NYS Senate has passed Senate Bill S8129-B which places a moratorium on drilling until next May. The Assembly Bill has not been voted on as this is written. You are urged to contact your Assembly member and the Governor to pass this bill.

Ask your Legislative representative and candidates to support prohibition of the use of toxic, carcinogenic or otherwise harmful chemicals in the fracturing fluids. The use of safe alternatives will affect the health of millions of New Yorkers and should be a top priority for legislators, the Governor, and the Department of Environmental Conservation.

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October 1, 2010