

“The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania’s public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all the people.”

The Commonwealth Of Pennsylvania- Article I Section 27

Negative Impacts of Natural Gas Drilling
Mrs. Victoria Switzer
Dimock, Pa.
April 7, 2010

Dear Senators,

My name is Victoria Switzer and I live in Dimock. We were once known as a village and are now referred to as the Dimock Gas Field or the Dimock Project.

I have spent much of the past three years trying to bring to the public’s attention that the natural gas boom may not be the answer to our prayers. It has been an exhaustive and frustrating experience yet I persevere against incredible obstacles. It is my belief in the democratic process, my belief in the United States of America and my love for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania that allows me to continue. I do not believe I have a choice. As my 84 year old dad, a true Patriot who served in WWII said, “You don’t always get to pick the war, it finds you, and you cannot turn your back on it when it does, you cannot put your head in the sand. You have to do the right thing. You’ll do it.”

In the fall of 2006 we entered into a lease agreement with a gas company. We were misinformed, uninformed and naïve. Regretably, we did not seek legal council, it was not advised or seemed necessary. The lease was indicated to be the standard document for exploratory purposes. The clause providing state and federal law and regulation seemed adequate to protect the land. “There might be some gas here. We might drill a well. We’ll drill one well and you’ll never know we were here. They’ll just be a little pipe we call the “Christmas tree”. All told by a kindly elderly gentleman-a landman. He offered compensation of twenty-five dollars per acre and a few dollars in royalty payment if they did indeed drill a well. We did not have reason to be suspicious or alarmed.

That transaction has translated into 90 million dollars from a 9 square mile area for the gas company.

That same transaction has become a nightmare for a small group of folks living on Carter Road and the valley below. That 9 square mile area is home.

We now sit in the middle of 63 natural gas wells. In spite of what has gone terribly wrong here, the 2010 plan calls for a “doubling of their efforts”. That translates into 73 more horizontals and 10 additional vertical wells-all in little more than the original 9 square mile area. Basically there will be 16 gas wells per square mile. Without spacing or well density regulation we can end with a well drilled every 500 feet...

The gas company is not going to leave this area until it has exhausted the land and extracted the last isotope of gas. We receive the least compensation-an illegal 12.5% royalty payment minus transportation costs. We made it possible for Cabot to climb the corporate rig to an enviable position. With the existing Tennessee pipeline and the lucrative leases –we are as the Native Americans were in the infamous sale of Manhattan.

Spacing regulation, or lack of it, is just one of the many unfortunate details of this "Marcellus Madness". It seems that regulations are proposed or examined after the rigs are in place. "Rigs before Regs" seems ludicrous. The plan is being written while the industry continues to drill. What other industry gets to install its business, at this pace, and then figure out what to do about the potential negative consequences such as a toxic waste product?

Without prior environmental impact studies or geological testing we here in Dimock represent an experiment gone wrong, this rapid pace of the industrialization of rural Susquehanna County and the rest of the State is a formula for disaster. Negatives may far outweigh the temporary economic boom.

DEP has documented the failures of the gas company. They have found Cabot Oil and Gas responsible for failure to cement and case numerous wells properly. The list of violations, spills, incidents is long.

I do not understand how this company was allowed to continue its operations in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

I do not understand why repeated violations were documented but without fines or penalties imposed. Serious monetary penalties would have set the tone early on- DO IT RIGHT IN PA OR PAY!!!

I fail to understand how the Commonwealth can allow the destruction of its resources for the profit of the out-of-state companies. Additionally, I am distressed by the sale of our mineral resources to other countries while my interest in protecting the Commonwealth from the exploitation of its resources is called "unpatriotic".

In this frenzy to establish their presence and extract the natural gas, safety and caution have been abandoned. We know all too well how that will play out. Historically, Pennsylvania has been abused. Her recovery this time is the question that only time will answer. I fear there will be little we can do to correct or restore something as huge as this massive industrialization of rural Pennsylvania.

Negative Impacts:

1. Diminished or contaminated drinking water supplies
2. Destruction of roads, bridges and increased traffic beyond road's capabilities and decreased safety for drivers as well as pedestrians
3. Loss of continuous forest-public and private
4. Decreased quality of air-increase of diesel fumes, smog
5. Increased litter and refuse-roads and woods-seismic testing debris everywhere
6. Loss of quality of life-peace of mind, stress and grief
7. Fear of known and unknown aspects of drilling activities-example: use of deadly methanol to de-ice pipeline. Fracturing fluids are part of the concern but not the only concern. Drilling and extraction is dirty work-not clean and natural
8. Fear for safety-proximity of wells to dwellings
9. Danger to public waters- spills, drainage, pit overflow and waste burial or discharge
10. Loss of Aesthetics- Pennsylvania's beautiful rolling hills -loss of recreational activities
11. Loss of a sense of control over one's own destiny-loss of home or property value
12. Division of communities-few gain, many lose
13. Massive destruction for short term gain

14. Influx of industry employees who do not have an interest in preserving the Commonwealth
15. Loss of businesses-organic farmers, tourism, recreational activities
16. Without serious and vigilant regulation-the loss of the value of the Commonwealth as a home for future generations. Who will live here when the drilling is done?

I am requesting a cessation of both drilling and expansion of infrastructure until regulations have been thoroughly examined and determined to be not just adequate but of the highest standard.

The increase of field personnel, water quality as well as oil and gas inspectors must be adequate to handle the number of wells that are permitted. Leaving the gas company to the "honor system" only works if honor is part of their vocabulary. From first hand observation I do not believe that to be the case. For too long the assumption that self regulatory is adequate has prevailed. Its failure has been proven without a doubt here in Dimock.

Last years increased DEP staff did not make it to the trenches. One water quality inspector and one oil and gas inspector have had to cover 5 counties, 3 of which have had active drilling operations. The staff hired allowed the expedition of the permitting process. There are 5,200 permits for 2010. How many inspectors will reach the well sites at the critical operational stage?

It is extremely important that permits be stamped only after the thorough examination of the proposed well site by a knowledgeable, impartial hydro geologist and conservation officer. The Watershed areas must be a priority. Drainage and adequate safeguards must be in place before a well can be drilled.

Pennsylvania's beauty must not be compromised. Our rolling hills must not be decapitated. Our forests must not be recklessly plundered.

Waste water treatment disposal must have an "in place" plan-not a proposal for a few years into the future! The waste water is being produced daily- as we speak! Dilution is not a solution. Surely we have the opportunity to put science to work here and create treatment facilities-jobs that can reduce if not eliminate toxins and contaminants.

Transparency is a must. When we-residents of Dimock asked for a plan we were denied that information. They did not and would not tell us of their plan. It was one nasty surprise after another and it continues. A community must have a public meeting with the gas company and have access to the true nature of the gas well drilling industry. Maps are drawn up long before the residents see them. Future, lucrative plans are written by the gas company while the common citizen ponders the parade of trucks and equipment in awe.

I beseech you, as senators of this state, our elected officials, to do all that is possible to safeguard the Commonwealth and its citizens. I beg you to ask for and conduct public hearings over the next few months. Ask for regulations to be revised and in place before further drilling can occur. Ask for a correction of coerced, antiquated and illegal leases. Request and demand adequate staff to monitor the crucial phases of the drilling as well as conduct adequate preliminary examination of the drilling sites. Protect your constituents. Protect Pennsylvania for today and tomorrow.

"Hit pause, there is no rewind, only a fast forward into a disastrous future"

Victoria L. Switzer