

Comment Sought On Study

EPA Evaluating Natural Gas Drilling

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HARRISONBURG - The federal government is moving forward with its study of a controversial natural gas drilling technique that's been proposed in northwestern Rockingham County.

The Environmental Protection Agency is seeking public comments on its evaluation of the impact hydraulic fracturing has on water. A series of meetings are being held to solicit comments and suggestions for what the study should entail.

The closest meeting to Harrisonburg is on July 22 in Canonsburg, Pa. Comments can be e-mailed to hydraulic.fracturing@epa.gov. For more information, go to www.hfmeeting.cadmusweb.com. Drilling for natural gas in Marcellus Shale, a large sedimentary formation, has grown exponentially in the last several years as energy companies seek to cash in on reserves previously underestimated and considered economically unfeasible. EPA's two-year, nearly \$2 million review announced this spring comes after a 2004 study the agency conducted that found no evidence the practice threatens drinking water. Critics said the study was too narrow and incomplete, and Congress asked for a new review last year. "Between then and now, a lot of other issues have arisen," EPA spokeswoman Enesta Jones said. Shenandoah Valley conservationists and concerned residents have been well aware of those issues since the matter first surfaced locally in February. Carrizo (Marcellus) LLC, a division of Houston-based energy company Carrizo, requested a special-use permit application from Rockingham County to drill for natural gas in Bergton. The Board of Supervisors tabled the request until county officials could gather more information about the hydraulic fracturing - also known as hydrofracking or fracking. Hydrofracking involves pumping a mixture of millions of gallons of water, sand and chemicals into the formation, fracturing the rock and releasing the gas. The process - and negligence by energy companies - has been blamed on drinking water contamination in states where Marcellus gas production is under way, such as in Pennsylvania. Kate Wofford, executive director of conservation group Shenandoah Valley Network, said EPA should study the chemicals used in hydrofracking and their concentrations. Exceptions were made in the Clean Water Act allowing companies to not disclose the chemicals in the cocktail. "The EPA needs to look at that," she said. "For example, in Rockingham County, [the proposed drill site is] in the flood plain. The EPA needs to look at what are the particular risks in the flood plain." Contact Jeremy Hunt at 574-6273 or jhunt@dnronline.com

