

Texas Mayor To Speak To Drilling Critics Opponents Of Proposed Bergton Gas Well To Host DISH Leader

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By Jeremy Hunt

HARRISONBURG - The mayor of a rural Texas town who says his community has been adversely affected by natural gas production will speak to Rockingham County residents this week about what opponents of a proposed drilling project should do if the project moves forward.

Calvin Tillman, mayor of DISH, Texas, is scheduled to speak via telephone at meetings on Tuesday and Thursday hosted by residents of northwestern Rockingham County who are concerned about a proposal to drill for natural gas in Bergton.

The meetings also feature the screening of "Split Estate: What You Don't Know CAN Hurt You," a documentary critical of the natural gas industry. The first meeting is Tuesday at the Plains District Community Center in Timberville, and the second will be at J. Frank Hillyard Middle School in Broadway. Both events begin at 7 p.m. and are free and open to the public.

Carrizo (Marcellus) LLC, a subsidiary of Carrizo Oil and Gas Inc., filed a special-use permit application with Rockingham County to construct an exploratory well in Bergton. The Rockingham County Board of Supervisors tabled Carrizo's request in February so officials could explore the issue before making a decision.

Some residents have raised concerns about how the proposal could impact the surrounding environment, particularly groundwater. Company officials say Carrizo has a track record of responsible drilling.

It's unclear when the board will take the application off the table for a vote.

Tillman is traveling around the Northeast speaking to communities that lie above the Marcellus Shale field, which energy companies have begun to tap into in recent years.

"I'm hoping to educate folks," Tillman said.

While most of the shale formation is in West Virginia, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York, a small portion of it underlies northwestern Rockingham County.

DISH, Texas - which in 2005 changed its name from Clark in exchange for a decade of free satellite television for its residents from DISH Network - has the "full gamut" of the natural gas industry, including wells in the Barnett Shale formation, the mayor said.

The town paid \$15,000 to commission an air quality test last year that found high levels of toxins around the town, including Benzene, a known carcinogen.

Blood and urine samples of 28 DISH residents tested positive for the same toxins identified in the air study, an environmental health scientist told the Denton Record-Chronicle last week.

Half of those tested had elevated levels of one or more toxins, the mayor said.

But an official with the Texas Department of State Health Services said that residents could be exposed to such toxins in a variety of ways, and cautioned against jumping to conclusions, according to the Record-Chronicle.

Tillman advocates for stricter regulation of energy companies to prevent problems associated with natural gas production.

"If you're going to do this, make the process a little bit better," he said.

Rockingham County residents should have air, water and soil samples conducted prior to any drilling in case something goes awry, he said.

"If the worst happens at least you have some legitimate data to use," he said. "The companies themselves will say, 'You can't prove we caused that.' [So,] you need to get data prior to the drilling actually taking place."

Contact Jeremy Hunt at 574-6273 or jhunt@dnronline.com

