



For Immediate Release

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Pennsylvania Gas Well Approval Process Threatens Public Health, Court Hears

Delaware Riverkeeper Network and Clean Air Council Begin Their Argument Today Before the Pennsylvania Environmental Hearing Board

ERIE, PA –Delaware Riverkeeper Network and Clean Air Council argued today at a hearing before the Environmental Hearing Board that the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP) approves gas well permits that undermine local community health and the environment.

The hearing is a challenge to the Geyer unconventional gas well site permits issued by PADEP to Rex Energy in September 2014. The Geyer well site is within a half-mile of the Mars Area School District campus in Butler County, and fewer than 1,000 feet from a residential community. Hydrogeology, public health, and air emissions experts are testifying at the hearing that unconventional gas development activities cannot be safely carried out at this location. They will testify that studies have documented the negative health effects on residents exposed to such gas wells, and that the proposed location puts children at risk. Experts are also testifying in the hearing that PADEP approved the gas well permits near the school without sufficient information to determine whether the drilling could take place in a safer manner.

“By approving the Geyer well site permit in the face of all evidence of the harms it will inflict and the health and safety threat it poses, the Department of Environmental Protection has neglected its obligation to protect our state’s environment, our kids and our communities,,” said **Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper** and leader of the regional watershed organization the Delaware Riverkeeper Network. “Pennsylvania’s constitution requires protection of our environmental rights, including by denying drilling permits if necessary. The state must stop these reckless approvals and instead prioritize its obligation to protect the people of Pennsylvania, public health, and the environment.”

Joseph Otis Minott, Esq., Executive Director and Chief Counsel of the Clean Air Council, also questioned PADEP's gas drilling approval process. "The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's duty is to protect the environment and the people's health, not gas industry profits," said Mr. Minott. "The Geyer well site threatens the health of nearby children, and that is simply unacceptable. Every piece of peer-reviewed research that has studied the health impacts of unconventional gas development has found that the activity puts people's health at risk. It's time for the Department to take these risks seriously. If a gas company wants to put a well site near schools and residential communities, the Department has to carefully scrutinize the project, assess the risks, and minimize the harms. And where the harm cannot be sufficiently reduced, the Department has a constitutional obligation to deny permits for the project. The Department's review of the Geyer well site was woefully inadequate. I hope the Environment Hearing Board recognizes the gravity of the Department's deficient review."

The groups argued that to fulfill its duties under the state's constitutional Environmental Rights Amendment, PADEP must conduct a site-specific review assessing an activity's impact on Pennsylvanians' environmental rights before issuing a permit. They also argued that where threats to environmental rights or public natural resources are identified, PADEP is obligated under the amendment to mitigate the threat through the imposition of permit conditions, and if necessary, permit denials.

The hearing is before the Honorable Steven C. Beckman, at the Erie, Pennsylvania office of the Environmental Hearing Board, on the fourth floor of the Renaissance Center on 1001 State Street. The hearing will resume each morning at 9:30 am, and continue if necessary through Thursday, December 22 at the same location.

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[Delaware Riverkeeper Network \(DRN\)](#) is a nonprofit membership organization working throughout the four states of the Delaware River Watershed including Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and New York. DRN provides effective environmental advocacy, volunteer monitoring programs, stream restoration projects, public education, and legal enforcement of environmental protection laws.

[Clean Air Council](#) is a member-supported, non-profit environmental organization dedicated to protecting everyone's right to breathe clean air. The Council has over 8,000 members and works in Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey on public education, community advocacy, and legal oversight and enforcement of environmental laws. The Council is a founding member of Protect Our Children, a coalition of parents, concerned citizens, and advocacy organizations, dedicated to protecting school children from the health risks of shale gas drilling and infrastructure.