

Gas Drilling in the Town of Dryden By Mary Ann Sumner

A recent Cornell poll asked New Yorkers if gas drilling benefits outweigh risks. Among upstate responders, 35% say yes, 43% say no and 22% are undecided. I'm among the undecided. It's a complex subject and groups on all sides have oversimplified and exaggerated to make their points. Here are a few things I know about it that may help you understand and join in the conversation.

Some things we know:

[DEC's Searchable Database](#) Includes records of ten applications for gas well drilling in Dryden. Six led to wells being drilled, one in 1941 and several in 1999. One application, known as Cook 1, is still active and no permit has been issued.

Three of the six wells drilled targeted Oriskany sandstone - about 2,000' deep. Three targeted Black River limestone/dolomite - 7,000' deep. Marcellus Shale in this area is about 4,000' deep. All six wells have been plugged and/or abandoned. Check [Geology.com](#) for more information about rock formations.

DEC may publish a revised draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement ([SGEIS](#)) in June. A thirty-day comment period is required following its publication. Many municipalities and other agencies have requested a ninety-day comment period. According to [Executive Order #41](#), following the comment period (possibly as early as July or as late as December), DEC must report to the governor on "the status of the Final SGEIS."

Accidents and damage have occurred at gas drilling [sites in Pennsylvania](#) and other states.

Some things we're concerned about:

Accidental release of natural gas or drilling fluids will contaminate surface and ground water.

Concentrated truck traffic will damage roads, affect air quality and disturb the tranquility of neighborhoods.

The light, noise, chemicals and human activity associated with large scale industrial scale development will damage sensitive environmental areas as well as rural neighborhoods.

What we're doing:

Road Use Regulations: Highway Superintendent, Jack Bush, has been working with Delta Engineers since last year, analyzing traffic patterns and road conditions. This information is necessary for writing road use regulations that allow us to restrict traffic on

some roads and negotiate road use agreements with developers whose projects create temporary, concentrated traffic. A road use agreement sets forth the standard by which road damage will be calculated and holds the developer responsible for maintaining the roads they use to our standards.

Critical Environmental Areas: The Conservation Board has identified and described thirty-one Critical Environmental Areas (CEAs) in Dryden. Definition of Critical Environmental Areas is a tool, recognized by New York State, to require special consideration for certain areas in permitting processes. Most CEAs in Dryden are wetlands or bodies of water, resources of great concern with regard to industrial development.

Noise Regulations: In March we passed a zoning amendment establishing Sound Performance Standards. We will be strengthening this in the new zoning law we're working on.

Aquifer Protection District: We have reviewed the legislation the Town of Virgil has created. We plan to develop similar legislation to protect the Virgil Aquifer in Dryden.

Banning: We have authorized Councilperson Leifer to work with Town Attorney Mahlon Perkins and other attorneys to draft legislation effectively banning gas drilling from the Town of Dryden. There are many aspects to be debated and information changes almost as fast as we can absorb it. We know that the state pre-empts local regulation of gas drilling. We know that the state has reaffirmed local control of land use regulation. We are researching the extent to which we can regulate the siting of gas drilling. Senator Seward is co-sponsoring [S.3472](#) "that would empower local governments and allow them to regulate natural gas drilling through local planning and zoning."

It's hard to be objective about this. Some of you will think I've grossly understated the dangers. Some will think I've underestimated the importance of gas drilling. I have, in fact, done both in hopes of generating a rational discussion of what we want to do in the Town of Dryden.

Links from above:

- [DEC's Searchable Database](http://www.dec.ny.gov/cfm/xtapps/GasOil/) <http://www.dec.ny.gov/cfm/xtapps/GasOil/>
- [SGEIS](http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/58440.html) <http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/58440.html>
- [Executive Order #41](http://www.governor.ny.gov/archive/paterson/executiveorders/EO41.html)
<http://www.governor.ny.gov/archive/paterson/executiveorders/EO41.html>
- [sites in Pennsylvania](http://www.marcellus-shale.us/seeps_leaks_spills.htm) http://www.marcellus-shale.us/seeps_leaks_spills.htm
- [Aquifer Protection District](http://gdacc.files.wordpress.com/2010/05/virgilaquiferprotectionlaw.pdf)
<http://gdacc.files.wordpress.com/2010/05/virgilaquiferprotectionlaw.pdf>
- [S.3472](http://open.nysenate.gov/legislation/bill/S3472-2011) <http://open.nysenate.gov/legislation/bill/S3472-2011>