

Review of fracking health risks sought

Foes say DEC shouldn't offer rules while review is incomplete

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Environmental Consultant Walter Hang speaks to the media during a press conference on fracking held at the State Capitol in Albany, N.Y. Dec 3, 2012 (Skip Dickstein/Times Union)

ALBANY — Opponents of hydrofracking said Monday that Gov. [Andrew Cuomo](#) has put the regulatory cart before the horse, with the state [Department of Environmental Conservation](#) offering rules to control hydrofracking while a newly launched review of its health impacts remains incomplete.

Opponents at the Capitol called for a public hearing on the potential health risks associated with fracking, something that currently would not be required under the DEC roadmap which will oversee the ultimate decision on whether the natural gas drilling technique should be allowed.

DEC offered its potential rules on Thursday, but those rules were done without the benefit of a review of fracking's potential impacts on human health being done by three experts hired by the state [Health Department](#). Hired last month, the experts are working under a contract that, in one case, limits the panelist to be paid for no more than 25 hours of work to review what DEC has prepared on fracking's health impacts. It's part of the DEC's Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement, which could guide the course of fracking in the Marcellus Shale if the state decides to proceed.

"That (timeline) is crazy," said [Sandra Steingraber](#), of the anti-fracking Concerned Health Professionals of New York. "You cannot even read all the literature on health impacts in 25 hours."

She said the DEC's push to release proposed rules before a health study was ready was "something more befitting a third-world dictatorship than a modern democracy." DEC will accept public comments on its rules from Dec. 12 through Jan. 11.

The agency had to issue revised regulations by Nov. 29 or risk delay for another public comment period. When the agency issued regulations, it also filed for a 90-day extension to avoid having to restart the process for drafting rules.

The Health Department has not released the contract that it has with the three experts, and also has not specified what DEC material it is reviewing, nor how that review is supposed to be conducted.

"This review is being conducted in total secrecy ... in a ludicrously short time period," said Assemblywoman [Barbara Lifton](#), D-Ithaca.

She called for the governor's office to release details of the expert review, as well as for creation of a public comment period — including at least one public hearing — on fracking and human health before DEC makes any final decision.

[Walter Hang](#), an environmental consultant with Toxics Targeting, located in Ithaca, said there are "hundreds" of cases of drinking water contamination and improper disposal of drilling wastes in New York for oil and gas drilling that is already allowed.

He said hundreds of abandoned oil and gas wells could be a pathway for methane and natural gas from new hydrofracked wells to escape into the environment and present a health risk.

Read more: <http://www.timesunion.com/local/article/Review-of-fracking-health-risks-sought-4088297.php#ixzz2E7M70eNJ>