

## Ithaca firm petitions to extend moratorium

By Liz Lawyer • [elawyer@gannett.com](mailto:elawyer@gannett.com) • November 23, 2009, 10:25 pm

Walter Hang of Toxics Targeting in Ithaca was scrounging Monday for celebrities to enlist in his fight against gas drilling in the Marcellus Shale.

"Anybody know the Dalai Lama?" he said to a group gathered in the Women's Community Building Monday evening. "Anybody know Richard Gere?"

Hang and the group of about 100 area residents were forming a battle plan against the [state Department](#) of Environmental Conservation's proposed Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement, which, if adopted by the state, would allow a de facto moratorium on horizontal hydraulic fracturing to end in New York.

The draft document suggests new requirements to add to state regulations established in 1992 to govern gas drilling. However, Hang said, neither the added regulations or the original regulations are adequate to protect New York residents from pollution due to gas drilling.

The draft statement was released at the end of September, and Hang is organizing a grassroots opposition movement to kill the proposal within 40 days, when the comment period is set to end.

"There are 15,000 existing wells (in New York state)," he said. "We have had these wells for decades and decades. There only about seven wells that go into the Marcellus formation. The state of New York has said literally for years that they have never even had a problem, but that turns out not to be true."

He went on to cite examples of [drinking](#) water polluted beyond acceptable drinking standards, though the private and public wells it came from were placed farther than the required distance from natural gas wells.

"The bottom line is the government is not safeguarding your [health](#) and your safe environment, and this is the proof," he said.

Hang, whose company maintains databases of pollution sites, is circulating a petition to have the governor withdraw the proposal, thereby allowing the moratorium on drilling permits to continue, and allowing more time to push for stronger environmental cleanup protections. He urged the group to help gather more signatures for the petition, which has drawn nearly 2,000 supporters in the past 10 days, he said.

The petition calls for a ban on discharging hydraulic fracturing wastewater to publicly owned treatment works and a review of deep-well injection of wastewater, a revision of state-required reporting of uncontrolled oil and gas releases, a dedicated state oil and gas drilling remediation [fund](#) to take care of "orphan sites" left by drilling companies, increased staffing of the state Department of Environmental Conservation, and protection for citizens' private right of action against drilling companies.

Linda Lavine of Ellis Hollow, who signed the petition Monday, said most of her neighbors have signed leases with oil and gas companies to drill for [natural gas](#) on their land.

"Even those who signed leases should be happy with what you're doing," she said, "because even if they want this to eventually go forward, they should want these protections in place."

Town of Ithaca board member Rich DePaolo, who also has signed the petition, said: "I agree with (Hang's) proposal, and I intend to do something at the town level. From what I'm hearing, I think the process is being railroaded. I think the moratorium should be extended" to allow the adoption of stronger regulations.