

PRESS & SUN-BULLETIN

Fracking opponents want broad health review



Walter Harg, president of an Ithaca-based environmental database firm, targets photos that he said illustrates pollution from hydraulic fracturing. JESSICA BARBERMAN/STAFF PHOTO

Critics say transparent process, more time for public input needed

By Joseph Spector
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ALBANY — Environmental groups and elected officials opposed to hydraulic fracturing urged the state Monday to expand its health review of the controversial drilling technique.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation last week filed for

a 90-day extension for its hydrofracking regulations. In mid-November, the state tapped three experts to review the regulations for any public-health impacts.

Critics said Monday that the health review needs further transparency and public input.

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Man kills ex-wife at church service

"Tremendous grief" in small Pennsylvania community

Staff and wire reports

COULDSBERT, Pa. — An elementary school music teacher walked into a Sunday church service in Coudersport, shot his ex-wife as she sat at the church organ, then left and returned to shoot

her again, according to a criminal complaint filed in District Court in Galeton.

Gregory Eldred, 52, of Dutch Hill Road in Coudersport, about 60 miles southwest of Elmira, has been charged with first-degree murder, third-degree murder, simple assault, recklessly endangering another person and terrorist threats in the shooting.



Darlene Siler

Eldred is accused of killing his ex-wife, Darlene Siler, 53, at the First United Presbyterian Church on 402 N. Main St., where she served as organist and choir director. Siler died of multiple gunshot wounds and was pronounced dead at the scene.

Witnesses told police they saw Eldred pacing outside the 180-year-old church before the service and that other members of the congregation grabbed Eldred after the shooting around 11:20 a.m. and held him until police arrived. Nobody else was injured.

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Binghamton Mayor Matthew T. Ryan discusses his concerns about hydrofracking Moxley at the state Capitol. JESSICA BARBERMAN/STAFF PHOTO

ON THE WEB

Read the criminal complaint with this story on pressconnects.com

Review

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"We're appalled at the way this process has gone forward," Binghamton Mayor Matthew T. Ryan said at a news conference at the Capitol. "The most important part of this whole thing is the public health, and it's almost like it's an afterthought."

The group called for Gov. Andrew Cuomo to provide more details about the health review, which is being overseen by the state Health Department and its commissioner, Nirav Shah. They want a 30-day public comment period for the health review and for its scope to be expanded.

"The public has no idea how the review is being undertaken and has never been afforded an opportunity to review and comment on it," said Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton, D-Ithaca. "The time allocated for the review is ludicrously short and obviously inadequate."

The DEC said in a statement Friday that hydrofracking would not move forward unless it was deemed safe.

It also won't happen until the health review is finished.

"DEC will not take any final action or make any decision regarding hydraulic fracturing until after Dr. Shah's health review is completed and DEC, through the environmental impact statement, is satisfied that this activity can be done safely in New York state," DEC spokeswoman Emily DeSantis said in a statement.

Hydrofracking opponents raised concerns that the health review might be short.



Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton, D-Ithaca, criticized the short length of the comment period and what she called a lack of transparency in the process. Binghamton Mayor Matthew T. Ryan is to her right. JESSICA BAKERMAN/STAFF PHOTO

The contract with the three academic professionals runs through Feb. 13, but one of the experts told Gannett's Albany Bureau last month that the work was to be finished by Monday.

"The public is being exposed to gas and oil pollution. No one knows what their health concerns are," said Walter Hang, president of an Ithaca-based environmental database firm, Toxics Targeting. "No one has ever investigated it thoroughly, and that's how come this Department of Health review has to be comprehensive."

Pro-drilling groups said they are comfortable with the ongoing review and that the process can be done safely.

They have argued that hydrofracking would be a boon to the economy of the struggling Southern Tier.

The newly proposed

regulations will be open to public comment from Dec. 12 through Jan. 11.

High-volume hydrofracking hasn't been allowed in New York — part of which sits above the gas-rich Marcellus Shale in the Southern Tier.

The environmental review was launched more than four years ago.

The Independent Oil & Gas Association said it has some concerns about the new regulations, which were released Friday.

But overall, the group said it hopes the regulatory review is nearing the end.

"We are pleased that there is progress toward ending the four-plus-year delay. Only time will tell how oil and natural gas producers will now view New York compared to other states," Brad Gill, the gas industry group's executive director, said in a statement Friday.