

Press Release

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Grassroots Honors Westchester Legislators for Fracking Waste Ban

(Rye, NY) Grassroots Environmental Education, a New York non-profit organization with a regional office in Rye, has recognized four Westchester County Legislators for their leadership and vision in helping to ban radioactive and toxic gas drilling waste from being disposed, processed or utilized in the County. At a ceremony at Wainwright House on November 14, the group honored legislators Catherine Borgia, Peter Harckham, Bill Ryan and Judy Myers.

"Public awareness of the serious health and environmental impacts of fracking is growing across the country, and yet many people are still under the impression that these negative impacts are confined to areas where these operations are conducted," said Ellen Weininger, Regional Director of Grassroots. "As the expansion of natural gas infrastructure sweeps across the tri-state area we are quickly learning that the pipelines, compressor stations, the new gas supply itself and other components of shale gas production bring health and environmental threats very close to home."

The rollout of the infrastructure to handle the natural gas expansion in the Northeast includes the proposed Spectra Algonquin pipeline slated for Westchester, Rockland and Putnam Counties, Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Highly-contaminated radioactive gas drilling waste from gas extraction operations can potentially cause irreversible damage to air, water, soil and food supplies, and yet there is no safe disposal plan in place for the billions of gallons of hazardous radioactive gas drilling waste that are produced.

Although often touted as a "clean alternative to coal," the full life cycle of shale gas production makes it a significant source of toxic pollution and one of the most significant contributors to climate change. The process involves the high-pressure injection of millions of gallons of fresh water mixed with hundreds of chemicals and sand—into well bores to crack open shale. Ten to forty percent of this toxic mixture returns back to the surface with the natural gas, along with additional contaminants including volatile organic compounds (VOCs), heavy metals, high levels of chlorides and bromides, and radioactive elements like radon and radium. clearing large swaths of land and creating a vast infrastructure of pipelines and giant compressor stations to bring the natural gas, primarily composed of methane, to our homes, schools and other buildings. Natural gas pipelines are subject to leakage and explosions, and compressor stations emit high levels of highly toxic pollutants twenty-four hours a day.

You might think that Federal laws such as the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act would protect citizens from these highly polluting activities, but all of these natural gas-related operations were exempted from these and other federal environmental laws under the Energy Act of 2005. So there are no laws on the books to protect us.

Gas drilling waste from the Marcellus Shale which underlies Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and New York could potentially contain high levels of radium-226 and radium-228, which are known carcinogens. Radium-226 has a half life of 1600 years and is linked to anemia, cataracts, bone, liver and breast cancers and death. Radon, a decay product of radium is considered the leading cause of lung cancer in non-smokers nationwide. The Marcellus Shale is known for its significantly higher levels of radium and its decay product, radon, and other radioactive materials.