

Interfaith group says it opposes Marcellus Shale wells as too risky

Health and climate are cited in analysis

Sunday, September 18, 2011

By Don Hohey, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

A statewide interfaith organization has introduced questions of morality and climate change into the debate about Marcellus Shale gas well development.

Pennsylvania Interfaith Power and Light today will issue a four-page "ethical analysis" that declares its opposition to development of the deep and massive shale gas play because it is not part of a strategy to end fossil fuel use, creates too many environmental and health risks, and perpetuates the "boom and bust" cycles of other, earlier extractive industries in the state.

"We believe there could be ethical ways to drill, but we're not there yet," said Rabbi Daniel Swartz, of Temple Hesed in Scranton and vice president and board member of the interfaith group. "We have questions about how Marcellus drilling fits into a general energy strategy and how it impacts communities in the state that have been subject to repeated booms and busts from the oil, coal and timber industries.

"We also need to figure out if we are setting ourselves up for problems down the road or setting ourselves up for something more sustainable," he said. "One of the biggest direct long-term impacts of this drilling is whether it's going to be contributing to climate change."

The organization's analysis also calls on all Pennsylvania elected officials to stop accepting political contributions from companies involved in the exploration, drilling, production, transportation and sale of Marcellus Shale natural gas. And it urges all congregations and faith-based institutions to reduce their energy use and refrain from entering into leases for Marcellus Shale gas development on their properties.

"Right now the state is making drilling and development decisions that will impact Pennsylvania for years to come, and Pennsylvanians need to know that their voices will be heard and that policy will not be governed by who is spending the most money," Rabbi Swartz said.

In discussing the organization's request that all faith-based organizations reduce their use of energy, much of which comes from burning coal, he said that such groups "need to answer to a higher authority and lead by example."

"It would be hypocritical to say stop gas development when we're getting most of our electricity from burning coal."

Congregations can also set an example for their communities by not leasing land for Marcellus Shale drilling, he said.

"We know congregations are strapped for money and that there's a tremendous amount of lease money out there that could be used to do good," Rabbi Swartz said. "But if they're getting money from something that's not ethically acceptable, then they're profiting from being immoral."

The ethical analysis, vetted and approved by the 12-member board of Pennsylvania Interfaith Power and Light this weekend, is to be released at the group's annual meeting on the campus of Penn State University in State College, Centre County.

The Pennsylvania Interfaith Power and Light was formed a year ago, has a membership of 50 congregations and 100 individuals, and is an affiliate of Interfaith Power and Light, a national interdenominational organization formed in the late 1980s in response to the threat of climate change.

According to the Pennsylvania organization's website, it sees "climate change as a moral issue, one that demands a response from people of faith." Natural gas development should be part of that climate debate, Rabbi Swartz said.

"The Marcellus debate also hadn't had a lot of input from the faith-based perspective, and because Pennsylvania is a state where people are active in their congregations and they had been silent, there was a need to fill that silence," he said. "The debate on both sides was missing those key points about the morality of energy use and development."

The IPL's document on drilling ethics, "Principles for considering Marcellus Shale Drilling," will be posted this afternoon on the organization's website: www.paipl.org.

Don Hopey: dhopey@post-gazette.com or 412-263-1983.

First published on September 18, 2011 at 12:00 am

More from Post-Gazette.com	More from the Web (sponsored)
The Hillmans are not amused	Krugman: "Gold bugs have taken over the GOP" (Gold Standard Now)
Drilling foes, proponents heading for shale conference	10 Signs Your Employees Are Having an Office Romance (All Business)
Shale formation in Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia could be another energy barn burner	"Why do great nations fail?" (Gold Standard Now)
Corbett skips shale conference to manage flood response	Expect a 'Twist' From the Fed This Week: Survey (TheStreet)
DEP plans new Oil and Gas Bureau; layoffs also planned	Forex: Euro Forecast Remains Bearish, Sterling Outlook Hinges On BoE (Daily FX)

[\[what's this\]](#)