



Yoko Ono, Sean Lennon and Susan Sarandon talk with the locals and media regarding hydraulic fracturing for gas reserves in their area. Photographer: Eric Roston

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Fracking Ruled Out by Pennsylvania in Town's Water Case

By Mark Drajem
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Methane in the water wells of a Pennsylvania town visited by Yoko Ono in her campaign against hydraulic fracturing wasn't caused by nearby drilling for natural gas, the state environmental regulator said.

In the northeastern town of Franklin Forks, samples from three private water wells are comparable in their chemical makeup to the natural spring at a nearby park where methane had been detected long before fracking began in the area, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

Testing also determined the gas in the water samples taken from the private water wells wasn't of the same origin as that in the nearby gas wells, the department said in a statement yesterday.

"We're pleased that a science-based, fact-finding effort by the state definitively showed that our operations were not responsible for methane migration issues," Susan Oliver, a

spokeswoman for WPX Energy Inc. (WPX), a driller some residents have blamed for polluting their water, said in an e-mailed statement.

The debate in Franklin Forks, 10 miles (16.1 kilometers) from the New York line, has drawn outside scrutiny. Officials, scientists, lawyers and anti-drilling activists from New York, which is considering ending a de facto moratorium on fracking, visit in droves. Ono came on a bus trip with her son, Sean Lennon, actress Susan Sarandon and anti-fracking filmmaker Josh Fox in January.

Local Resident

One resident, Tammy Manning, isn't convinced by the state's conclusions. She has sued WPX, saying her water woes began after the fracking for natural gas nearby. She said her case will continue.

"There are still far more questions than there are answers," Manning, who contends the methane in her home's well caused dangerous accumulations of gas inside her house, said in an interview. "Even if it migrated" from the park spring, "why did it migrate into all of our wells at exactly the same time?"

The state found methane concentrations in her water more than five times the level at which the state notifies homeowners that there could be risk. At the levels found in the Mannings' water, methane can escape the water and present a risk of explosion, the state DEP said in a letter to Manning on April 24.

Truthland Movie

The battle over fracking pits Manning, who spoke at a rally of fracking opponents outside an industry conference in Philadelphia in September, against Shelly DePue, who has four gas wells on her farm west of town and starred in an industry-funded film, "Truthland."

Other visitors to the area have included film crews and citizens from South Africa, Poland, France and Canada. They often take bus tours across the region, including stops at the Manning home.

The use of horizontal drilling and fracking, in which water, sand and chemicals are pumped underground to break apart rock formations and free trapped gas, has led to a surge in natural-gas production in Pennsylvania's Marcellus Shale formation.

The state had ordered WPX to test water sources in town and vent four wells that had high levels of methane, the key constituent of natural gas.

The company maintains that the isotopic signature of the gas, which scientists use as a kind of fingerprinting method, was similar to that found in nearby Salt Springs park.

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