

Pennsylvania Finally Reveals Fracking Has Contaminated Drinking Water Hundreds Of Times

BY **KATIE VALENTINE**  POSTED ON AUGUST 29, 2014 AT 9:28 AM UPDATED: AUGUST 29, 2014 AT 10:25 AM



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For the first time, Pennsylvania has made public 243 cases of contamination of private drinking wells from oil and gas drilling operations.

As the [AP reports](#), Pennsylvania's Department of Environmental Protection posted details about the contamination cases online on Thursday. The cases occurred in 22 counties, with Susquehanna, Tioga, Lycoming, and Bradford counties having the most incidences of contamination.

In some cases, one drilling operation contaminated the water of multiple wells, with water issues resulting from methane gas contamination, wastewater spills, and wells that simply went dry or undrinkable. The move to release the contamination information comes after years of the AP and other news outlets filing lawsuits and Freedom of Information Act requests from the DEP on water issues related to oil and gas drilling and fracking.

The Pennsylvania DEP has been criticized for its poor record of providing information on fracking-related contamination to state residents. In April, a Pennsylvania Superior Court case claimed that due to the way DEP operates and its lack of public record, it's impossible for citizens to know about cases where private wells, groundwater and springs are contaminated by drilling and fracking.

"The DEP must provide citizens with information about the potential harm coming their way," John Smith, one of the attorneys representing municipalities in the lawsuit, told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. "If it doesn't record and make available the violations records then it is denying the public accurate information, which is unconscionable."

Thomas Au of the Pennsylvania Sierra Club told the AP that the state DEP's decision to unveil the 243 cases of water contamination was a "step in the right direction."

Considering Pennsylvania's Marcellus shale boom started six years ago, however, "this is something that should have been made public a long time ago," Au said.

The release of contamination information also comes about a month after a report from the state's Inspector General that found that the rapid growth of the state's gas industry "caught the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) unprepared to effectively administer laws and regulations to protect drinking water and unable to efficiently respond to citizen complaints."

"It is almost like firefighters trying to put out a five-alarm fire with a 20-foot garden hose," Auditor General Eugene DePasquale said in a statement. "There is no question that DEP needs help and soon to protect clean water."

In January, Pennsylvania did confirm that it had received hundreds of complaints claiming fracking-related water issues in 2013 and 2012, but until now, hadn't released details on the contamination cases.

Pennsylvania has become a battleground state on issues relating to the impact of oil and gas operations, specifically fracking, on health and the environment. Earlier this month, Pennsylvania doctors, nurses, and health policy experts called on the state to investigate claims that the Department of Health tells employees not to talk to residents who come to them with complaints of supposed fracking-related health effects. And water contamination from fracking and drilling operations has become common, in Pennsylvania and in other states — West Virginia, too, has linked some water complaints to fracking, and according to a 2013 report, chemicals from oil and gas wastewater pits have contaminated water sources in New Mexico at least 421 times.