

WAYNE INDEPENDENT

Fracturing fluids spill into Susquehanna County stream

Thursday

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An investigation is underway into the spilling of 8,500 gallons of potentially harmful natural gas production fluid that also entered a stream and wetland in Dimock Township, Susquehanna County on Wednesday, *The Wayne Independent* has learned.

By Steve McConnell

An investigation is underway into the spilling of 8,500 gallons of potentially harmful natural gas production fluid that also entered a stream and wetland in Dimock Township, Susquehanna County on Wednesday, *The Wayne Independent* has learned.

"Frac gel" - a lubricating material used during the production process - poured out of a pipe that connected a chemical holding tank to a natural gas well, said Mark Carmon, a spokesperson for the state Department of Environmental Protection.

Cabot Oil & Gas Corp., a Texas company that has a number of natural gas wells in the area, reported the spill to DEP on Wednesday. The company is responsible for the incident, said Carmon.

DEP is in the process of identifying the exact nature of the fracturing fluids involved in order to measure the level of

harm posed by the chemicals for human health and local wildlife, he said.

Natural gas production companies use an array of chemicals, sand, and millions of gallons of water to extract the energy commodity by busting open underground rock formations, which are located more than a mile beneath the surface. The procedure is typically called hydraulic fracturing, or "fracing."

The spill occurred on two occasions: once in the afternoon and a second Wednesday evening, equating to an estimated 8,500 gallons of fracturing fluid illegally flowing into the environment.

The fluid made its way into Stevens Creek and a wetland, spurring a massive clean up and biological impact investigation by the state environmental regulator and the state fish & boat commission.

"We're up there again today (Thursday). We're doing sampling," said Carmon. "The most important thing for us is getting this cleaned up."

He added that the investigation will determine whether private wells need to be sampled for fracturing chemicals. The chemicals can be harmful to human health, causing sickness and the possibility of various forms of cancer. This would be Cabot Oil & Gas Corp's second disastrous incident in Dimock Township since the company began extensive drilling operations in the township last year. A protective well casing failed at a different well around December 2008, causing methane to pollute the local aquifer.

Due to that, neighbors in the area had their private wells tainted with methane, forcing some to drink bottled water. Their residences were also constantly monitored for the explosive yet odorless gas.

The spill on Wednesday occurred in the vicinity of a natural gas well named "Heitsman." According to a *Wayne Independent* review of DEP records, Cabot has five natural gas wells called "Heitsman" - with four of the five incurring violations from the state environmental regulator.

The violations centered on inadequate or non-existing erosion and sediment control plans, which prevent harmful chemicals, for example, from running off drill sites into nearby waterways.

More details will be reported as it becomes known.

