

Injection well firm to fund Ohio quake study

Washington--D&L Energy, the owner of the injection well at the center of the earthquake controversy in Youngstown, Ohio, has agreed to fund a geological survey of the land in and around its operations, a spokesman for the company said Thursday.

"We want to explore the geology and see if we can't get some answers as to why there has been seismic activity in the Youngstown, Ohio, area," said D&L spokesman Vince Bevacqua.

"At this point, all the authoritative sources, including the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, say there is no clear cause of the quakes, there is no demonstrated cause right now," he said. "There is a lot of popular speculation that the activity has to do with the D&L well."

The speculation was fueled Tuesday by a specialist hired by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources who said he believed there was a link between the well and the dozen earthquakes in the Youngstown area since November. But the ODNR has said "conclusive evidence cannot link the seismic activity to the well."

The most severe quake, which had a magnitude of 4.0, occurred December 31 and prompted the state to shut down D&L's operations on Monday.

Bevacqua said D&L, which is based in Youngstown, will pay for the study and specify the information it wants the report to cover. He added that no research firm has yet been retained.

"ODNR will get the data and decide what to do with it," Bevacqua said. "They will review it and they may have a peer review of it." Bevacqua said the study "will be rigorous. It will be a study that will be scrutinized carefully and D&L is prepared for that."

Meanwhile, the Ohio Senate may conduct a public hearing soon on the earthquakes and their relationship to injection wells, said State Senate President Thomas Niehaus.

The New Richmond Republican said he has discussed having a hearing in the Mahoning Valley with the chairmen of the Senate's energy and environment committees and with Governor John Kasich and House Speaker William Batchelder.

ODNR Director James Zehringer acknowledged there had been low-level seismic activity in the Youngstown area over the past eight months.

"While conclusive evidence cannot link the seismic activity to the well, Zehringer has adopted an approach requiring prudence and caution regarding the site," the DNR said in a statement.

State Senator Joe Schiavoni, a Canfield Democrat and the ranking Democrat on the Senate Energy and Public Utility Committee, said he supports having a hearing.

"We all want the same thing," he said. "We want the people of the Mahoning Valley to be educated about what is going on here with fracking and injection wells and all the things that come with drilling and exploring for natural gas."

He said he also has encouraged the governor's office to send a representative to a January 11 public hearing sponsored by the City of Youngstown. On Wednesday, the city council approved a resolution supporting a ban on injection wells within the city.

Schiavoni also said he thought drillers "should exercise caution on where they put these wells. I'm not an expert; I'm just trying to learn as much as I can so that I can be informed and go out and meet with constituents and talk to constituents."

He also said he is opposed to a ban on injection wells and the use of hydraulic fracturing on wells operating in the state's shale formations. "I don't think stopping all drilling across the state of Ohio is the answer to the problem," he said.

Meanwhile, Mansfield Mayor Timothy Theaker said he has invited Richland County elected officials to meet with him Friday to discuss how they should respond to licensed but undeveloped injection wells in Mansfield.

The ODNR has issued a permit to Preferred Fluids Management of Austin, Texas, to develop two wells for the injection of brine water produced in association with oil and natural gas drilling, the company said on its website. The wells would be drilled to a depth between 4,580 feet and 5,085 feet and when operational, would accept about 1,000 barrels of fluid/d under a maximum pressure of 1,255 pounds per square inch.

"We definitely need to look into [the earthquakes at Youngstown] and what are the prospects of earthquakes," Theaker said. Mansfield is 110 miles west of Youngstown.