



Pa. Woman Sues Gas Driller, Claims Water Tainted

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A woman is suing natural gas driller Chesapeake Energy Corp. and two of its subsidiaries, claiming that drilling near her rural home has fouled the water with methane and other pollutants and created a rash of health problems since 2009.

Judy Armstrong's lawyer, Peter Cambs, told The Associated Press on Thursday that the lawsuit, filed in state court in Bradford County on Wednesday, asserts that the woman has seen her water supply contaminated with methane, barium and other irritants that have left her with pain, numbness, cracking skin on her hands and headaches.

Chesapeake senior director for corporate development Brian Grove said Thursday the company had not seen the lawsuit and he could not comment on it.

Also named in the suit were Chesapeake subsidiaries Nomac Drilling LLC and Chesapeake Appalachia LLC.

The state Department of Environmental Protection views the potential for contamination by methane, a highly flammable gas, as among the most serious risks of gas drilling in the Marcellus Shale formation, which is primarily beneath Pennsylvania, New York, West Virginia and Ohio.

The DEP said last month that at least six residential wells were tainted with methane believed to be caused by Chesapeake's drilling operations. Those wells were in Wilmot Township, about eight miles from Sugar Run, where Armstrong lives. One county over, in Dimock, the DEP has accused another company of contaminating the water wells of nearly 20 residents.

Armstrong, who moved into the home in November 2009 from Gettysburg, said that after drilling began about three miles away her well water started getting air bubbles and, later, methane bubbles.

Water samples taken by Chesapeake confirmed the presence of methane in the water, but the results also showed "multiple chemicals in our water sample," Armstrong said. "A lot of heavy metals in our water that has totally increased."

Since then, she has had to rely bottled water for day-to-day use. Previously she used her water

well for drinking, bathing, cooking and washing.

Cambs said the DEP also conducted a test and found similar results. The DEP did not have the results immediately available.

Cambs said the gas wells — four of which are cited in the court filing — are within three miles of Armstrong's home.

"They noticed the drilling rigs went up and several weeks, sometime thereafter, they noticed there was air in the lines and it would spit out," Cambs said. "Then the water turned yellow and the amount of the spitting got worse and worse. They weren't really sure what it was."

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