



Text File

Introduced: 3/2/2011

Bill No: 2011-1494, **Version:** 1

Committee: City Council

Status: Adopted

WHEREAS, on February 26, 2011 the New York Times published an investigative article which highlights the significant risk that the process used to extract natural gas known as hydraulic fracturing poses to drinking water and the deficiencies in monitoring radioactive materials in drinking water, especially in Pennsylvania; and,

WHEREAS, Ian Urbina's New York Times article, Regulation Lax as Gas Wells' Tainted Water Hits Rivers, sourced from thousands of internal documents obtained from the Environmental Protection Agency, showed that the dangers to the environment and health are greater than previously understood. Urbina reports that:

- “More than 1.3 billion gallons of wastewater was produced by Pennsylvania wells over the past three years, far more than has been previously disclosed, and that most of this water was sent to treatment plants not equipped to remove many of the toxic materials in drilling waste.”
- “Of more than 179 wells producing wastewater with high levels of radiation, at least 116 reported levels of radium or other radioactive materials 100 times as high as the levels set by federal drinking water standards. At least 15 wells produced wastewater carrying more than 1,000 times the amount of radioactive elements considered acceptable.”

Urbina also reports that no testing has occurred at more than 65 drinking water intake sites since 2008 and that most haven't been tested since 2005; and,

WHEREAS, the danger of radioactive wastewater is its potential to contaminate drinking water or enter the food chain through fish or farming. The article notes that once radium enters a person's body, by eating, drinking, or breathing, it can cause cancer and other health problems; and,

WHEREAS, Congressman Edward J. Markey from Massachusetts wrote a letter to the Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa P. Jackson asking for responses to various reports in the New York Times story regarding toxic wastewater from hydraulic fracturing. Markey asked Jackson to provide any new steps the agency is taking to test sources of drinking water that are downstream from treatment plants that take in drilling waste and, if no regulatory changes are planned, to justify that decision in light of the New York Times report. He also asked for internal agency documents regarding studies of wastewater-treatment plants and their ability to remove radium and other toxic substances from drilling waste, and other possible harmful outcomes related to processing the by-products of hydraulic fracturing; and,

WHEREAS, on March 1, 2011, Senator Bob Casey, alarmed by the recent findings, wrote to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection and the Environmental Protection Agency calling for increased inspections of radioactive material that may be released into Pennsylvania water as a result of hydraulic fracturing and for the agencies to address the lack of inspections as drilling has increased in recent years; and,

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WHEREAS, Senator Casey has also called for increased public disclosure so that Pennsylvanians have more information about what is in their rivers and their drinking water.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Council of the City of Pittsburgh commends and supports Congressman Edward Markey and Senator Bob Casey, who called for the release of the reports that were mentioned in the New York Times article; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Council of the City of Pittsburgh calls on the Pennsylvania Water and Sewer Authority and Penn American to immediately begin testing for the radioactive materials cited in the article, to continue tests on a regular basis as long as drilling is occurring, and for them to make their findings available to the residents of the City of Pittsburgh because Pittsburgh City residents to deserve to know what is in their drinking water. Moreover, the Council of the City of Pittsburgh requests that Governor Corbett include the funds necessary to inform the public of the condition of their drinking water in the 2011 budget.