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Maryland will sue in Susquehanna tributary 'fracking' spill

Gas driller targeted

By Frank D. Roylance, The Baltimore Sun

7:41 PM EDT, May 2, 2011

Maryland's Attorney General has told a gas driller working in Pennsylvania that he plans to sue the company for violating federal anti-pollution laws after thousands of gallons of hydraulic fracturing fluid spilled into the Susquehanna River watershed last month.

In a "notice of intent to sue," Attorney General Douglas F. Gansler said there was an equipment failure April 19 at a gas well being drilled by Chesapeake Energy Corp. in Leroy Township, in north central Pennsylvania. The failure resulted in "loss of control of the well."

"Tens of thousands of gallons" of "fracking" fluid, used to fracture bedrock and release natural gas from the Marcellus Shale deep underground, leaked out and escaped the berm built to contain it, Gansler said. The fluid crossed neighboring farms, then flowed into Towanda Creek, a tributary of the Susquehanna River.

Gansler told the company the spill "may pose ... an imminent and substantial endangerment to the health of the population adjacent to the well site, recreational users of Towanda Creek and the Susquehanna River and to the environment. ..."

The fracking fluid contains hundreds of chemicals, some of them toxic, the attorney general argued, and the spill therefore constitutes a violation of the federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, and the Clean Water Act.

The Susquehanna provides 45 percent of the fresh water entering the Chesapeake Bay, and supplies drinking water to 6.2 million people. It is a backup source of water to Baltimore City in times of drought.

Brian Grove, senior director for corporate development at Chesapeake Energy Corp., said testing during the spill revealed "limited and very localized environmental impact, with no adverse affects [sic] on aquatic

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wildlife in Towanda Creek."

Testing in the Susquehanna a short distance downstream found "no effect whatsoever," he said. "We are confident there will be zero impact hundreds of miles away. The Susquehanna River and the Chesapeake Bay face many environmental threats; this event is not one of them."

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