

Communities, Residents Seek Relief From Drilling Activities

By **CYNTHIA McCLOUD**

For The State Journal

On a main route in Wetzel County, someone has suspended a dummy from a noose three different times with messages telling gas drillers to go home. Others have placed spikes in the road to tear up the tires of gas company vehicles. Guns have been fired over trucks, and work sites have been sabotaged.

Wetzel and Marshall counties are two areas of the state that have become hotbeds of industrial activity and emotion since workers have flooded the region to drill for gas in the Marcellus Shale.

Residents are frustrated about the changes in their quiet communities. Their chief complaints are about roads and traffic: potholes, dust, mud, truck accidents, noise, pollution and blocked access to emergency vehicles.

Chesapeake Appalachia LLC, the primary company working in Wetzel, said it is trying to relieve some of its impact on residents.

"The feelings are quite volatile here at moments," said **Raymond Renaud** of the **Wetzel County Action Group**. "Basically, we live in an industrial zone. You can imagine how it impacts quality of life."

The WCAG condemns threatening and vandalizing the drillers. The group formed three years ago "not to stop the drilling, but to ensure that residents are not impacted unnecessarily or dangerously," Renaud said.

Local residents said they have reason to be angry.

Because of the increased number and weight of vehicles, roads are deteriorating faster than they have in the past, said **Bob Whipp**, **Division of High-**



Photo courtesy of Raymond Renaud

Increased truck traffic from drilling in the Marcellus Shale is damaging local roads in Wetzel County, according to Bob Whipp, DOH district engineer.

ways district engineer over six counties, including Marshall and Wetzel.

"Most of the roads in the back areas are just little local roads that aren't strong enough to handle that kind of traffic," Whipp said. "They were never made for hard use.

"They're just being torn to pieces basically," he said. "You have base failures where the road just falls to pieces. Asphalt is being torn up. They're narrow. The trucks mash down the shoulders and fill up the ditch line so the roads have no drainage. That turns stone roads into mud roads. We've had quite a few truck accidents. Some have lost their brakes."

He said Chesapeake has repaired some of the roads, but with 10 to 20 companies working in the area at one time, no one company is solely to blame for the damage.

"Chesapeake takes responsibility for the effect our operations cause

on the roads," said **Stacey Brodak**, manager of corporate development for Chesapeake Appalachia. "Chesapeake works very closely with the West Virginia Division of Highways in determining road maintenance and repair needs. All of our company's work must be approved by the WVDOH.

"Chesapeake knows that the DOH does not have the resources to maintain the roads we are utilizing to access our well sites, and, therefore, we either perform the maintenance work ourselves or we contract it out. Chesapeake is working in Wetzel County for an extended period of time, and both repairs and maintenance need to be addressed as we continue to operate. Last year, we paved over eight miles of road on Brock Ridge and Route 89. Our maintenance and repair work is more important to the residents than our own traffic."

Besides trucks hauling drilling equipment, more are ferrying the millions of gallons of water that it takes to do the hydrofracturing drilling process and carrying earthmoving equipment to build the frac water ponds.

"These trucks cannot maintain their lanes around our turns," Renaud said. "We have a voluntary arrangement that they put a lead vehicle in front of the trucks to warn oncoming traffic. They have taken other measures, too. They put a pilot vehicle in front of school buses, and they have a security patrol they pay for that reports any violation of Chesapeake's regulations for conduct on the road."

For example, Chesapeake mandated trucks could not travel faster than 35 mph on roads with no posted speed limit.

"There are still a tremendous number of accidents taking place," said Re-

naud, who is a volunteer firefighter and emergency medical technician. In some cases, trucks have blocked roads and not reported it to EMS, and ambulances needed to get through to patients.

WCAG is lobbying the state to adopt a comprehensive permitting process that would look at the potential impact on everything, not just watersheds.

"The state should put regulations in place that don't allow drilling activity unless the infrastructure can support it or until they can fund the improvements to the infrastructure," Renaud said. "Right now, they move in, then we realize that it can't support it, and we're in trouble."

He said regulations would protect residents should they encounter a company that is not as amenable as Chesapeake.

"Chesapeake prides itself on being accessible and communicative in regards to our operational efforts," Brodak said. "We have corporate development staff members engaged with area residents, community leaders and action groups. The relationships that we have developed over the past two years have allowed us to understand our impact and to be able to respond accordingly in resolving issues."

Brodak added the company has hosted a community picnic and met with emergency responders. A Community Advisory Panel made nearly \$250,000 annually in philanthropic donations and established four full-time scholarships at **West Virginia Northern Community College** for residents of Wetzel and Marshall counties. During power outages this winter, it sent generators to residents and water systems and set up complimentary hot buffets for residents.