

FreshWater Accountability Project

Dedicated to preserving
and protecting our *freshwater*,
a basic human need, belonging to us all.

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Grassroots Group Opposes Plan to Dump Radioactive Frack Waste

GRAND RAPIDS, Ohio -- The Freshwater Accountability Project Ohio (FWAPOH), an organization of activists dedicated to water protection and opposed to oil and gas drilling via hydraulic fracturing (called “fracking”) filed a legal challenge with the Ohio Gas and Oil Commission in Columbus, questioning the legality of a proposed 200-acre fracking waste disposal project on undeveloped government land in Belmont County, near Barnesville, Ohio.

Relying on a law that went into effect last September, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) approved the project application in less than one week for EnerGreen Holding Company LLC of Columbus to dump a projected 600,000 tons per year of drill cuttings and sludge from the fracking process. The process will include mixing radioactive and chemically-contaminated waste from fracking of gas and oil wells with coal ash and other ingredients to make hardened slabs for roadbeds and frack pads and to develop an industrial park on the port authority land.

Under a section of environmental law that allows the of solidification of oil and gas drilling wastes to be called, “beneficial use,” huge concrete-like pads of this material will be poured onto open fields for conversion to industrial sites. Classification of drilling wastes as “beneficial use” material allows the party disposing of the material to avoid paying state-imposed fees levied according to tonnage being dumped.

Industry insiders and scientists have known for some time that fracking waste can be radioactive. Drill cuttings, drilling muds and sludge are laden with heavy metals and chemical agents used to extract gas and oil from deeply-buried underground shale layers. Other toxic materials such as arsenic and Uranium 238 once buried safely more than a mile below ground are brought to the surface due to fracking.

EnerGreen LLC states in its application for the ODNR permit that it will dispose of “vertical drill cuttings” and some liquids. A typical fracked well in the Utica shale zones of Ohio requires over five million gallons of water which becomes contaminated, laden with toxins added to facilitate withdrawal of the gas and oil and those brought back to the surface from deep underground. An average 1,500 to 2,000 tons of additional waste is brought up in the drilling from deep underground which can include arsenic, barium, strontium and water-soluble radionuclides. The ODNR has permitted EnerGreen to proceed without any governing standards to plan and commence a project to dispose of more than 13,000,000 tons of contaminated waste over the next decade at the Barnesville site.

“By the stroke of a pen, the ODNR has issued a temporary permit on an expedited basis allowing disposal of fracking waste with inadequate testing and characterization to know levels of toxicity and radioactivity. Due to artificially labelling this toxic waste as ‘beneficial use,’ there will be no soil and groundwater testing, no run-off protection, and none of the landfill liners or other protective steps that come with the regulated licensed landfills,” said Leatra Harper of FWAPOH. “On every front, Ohio is besieged by fracking and used as a resource colony to make it cheap and easy to destroy water, drill and dispose in this state. The magical classification of radioactive waste as non-hazardous cannot be tolerated just because our legislature wants to make it convenient for the industry to operate here. The risk to our air and water quality over time is just too great to allow this to happen.”

“So-called ‘downblending’ proposals like this one require suspension of the laws of chemistry and physics. By legislatively exempting this toxic stuff from necessary regulations, the industry maximizes profits by avoiding the high cost of proper disposal,” stated Terry Lodge, FWAPOH attorney. “There is nothing in this for Ohioans. There is very little income for government and nothing to monitor the contamination of land, air, and water. Radium in these wastes will take 5,000 years to decay, so continued dumping can increase toxicity and radioactivity to dangerous levels. We’re opposing the permit for the EnerGreen project to try to avoid future health problems and environmental devastation, especially to one of Ohio’s few remaining old-growth forests, Dysart Woods.”

"This project appears to be typical of the rush to develop shale gas without doing adequate and honest environmental impact studies or risk benefit analysis. It is a short term energy fix with very long term environmental impacts," said John Morgan of Beallsville, one of the parties to the appeal.

The existence of the EnerGreen plan was discovered only through a public records request to the ODNR after permit approval leaving little time to appeal within the brief 30-day window allowed. “We contacted the Belmont County Commissioners as soon as we learned about this facility and continue to follow-up,” stated Leatra Harper. “We are waiting to hear back from them and had hoped they would join us in this appeal.” Community leaders are urged to vigilantly protect their local region by investigating plans for frack waste disposal in their area and to act decisively to insure such dump sites are not permitted unless the Ohio legislature puts adequate rules and regulations in place.

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The FreshWater Accountability Project Ohio (www.FWAPOH.com) is dedicated to protecting Ohio’s valuable freshwater supplies from the consumptive use by horizontal hydrofracking, a highly unregulated industry which consumes massive amounts of water, and to educate and inform the public of the dangers of water destruction, pollution and waste dumping by this industry, as well as encourage and empower local citizens and elected officials to protect water quality and quantity from exploitation by those aiming to profit by selling our natural resources overseas for short-term corporate profits at Ohio’s long-term expense.