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08/08/2011

DEP Wants Nine More Gas Well Inspectors For State

MetroNews
Charleston, Kanawha County



Officials with the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection want to add to the number of inspectors to keep an eye on the anticipated increase in gas well sites across West Virginia.

Those with the agency say they're hoping lawmakers will include funding for those additional inspectors in legislation dealing with statewide regulations for natural gas drilling in the Marcellus shale.

"The cabinet secretary has said we need about \$2 million dollars because we're currently operating at a deficit," DEP Legal Counsel Kristen Boggs told a legislative interim committee last week. "To adequately get the program staffed up and get what we need to run the program would require an additional \$2 million dollars a year."

The DEP believes it can generate the funding it needs with new fees on drilling permits.

"At the current rate of permitting, if we went \$5,000 per hole, per well, it would generate \$2.1 million and allow us to hire nine additional people," she said.

Currently, the DEP has a staff of 17 field inspectors for gas wells in the state. Four of those are based in Southern West Virginia and the rest are in northern areas where much of the Marcellus shale development is happening.

Officials with the DEP say it will take more to meet the growing demands of the booming gas industry in the years to come.

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