

HARRISBURG, Pa., Sept. 27, 2013 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) announced today that an independent peer review of its Office of Oil and Gas Management found it to be proficient and ready to address the increase in oil and gas operations in Pennsylvania.

"This review demonstrates that the oil and gas industry in Pennsylvania is matched by world-class oil and gas management and regulations," DEP Acting Secretary Chris Abruzzo said. "Pennsylvanians can be assured that DEP is protecting their health and environment while oil and gas operations continue to grow."

The peer review was conducted by a non-profit, multi-stakeholder organization called State Review of Oil and Natural Gas Environmental Regulations, Inc. (STRONGER).

STRONGER is comprised of experts from government, industry and environmental organizations that conduct a state review process to evaluate program strengths and provide recommendations for program improvements of state oil and gas programs throughout the nation.

DEP's participation in the STRONGER review fulfills a recommendation put forth by Gov. Corbett's Marcellus Shale Advisory Commission.

In March 2013, DEP volunteered to have its program reviewed by STRONGER. Upon completion of the review, the team highlighted the strengths of the Office of Oil and Gas Management, particularly for:

- Increasing its staff levels to address additional permitting, inspection and enforcement activities related to increased unconventional gas well development;
- Expanding the program's public participation activities associated with the abandoned well sites program;

Pennsylvania's DEP's Oil and Gas Program, Regulations Commended in Peer Review

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- Initiating a comprehensive evaluation of radiation levels specifically associated with unconventional gas development, the first of its kind in the nation;
- Mandating that operators performing earth disturbance activities associated with oil and gas activities must develop and implement Erosion and Sedimentation Control Best Management Practices to minimize the potential for erosion and sedimentation; and
- Advancing its hydraulic fracturing program and requiring that well operators conducting well casing and cementing maintain control at all times, and prevent migration of gas or other fluids into sources of fresh groundwater.

Along with identifying strengths, the review team also made recommendations for the office to consider.

The recommendations included improvements, such as encouraging DEP to maintain consistent, standardized data for tracking violations and enforcement actions for the public; completing the TENORM study to ensure DEP is appropriately assessing production waste; considering developing a process to determine surface casing setting depths to protect fresh groundwater; and consider developing additional guidance for pre-drill sampling of water wells near potential well sites.

Abruzzo noted that the significant environmental enhancements included in Act 13 of 2012, which represented the first comprehensive update to the state's Oil and Gas Act in nearly 30 years, has contributed significantly to Pennsylvania's increased protections of public health and the environment.

"This STRONGER review is a very positive reflection on the shared commitment of Gov. Corbett and the members of the General Assembly who have worked hard to adopt environmental standards that are now national standards.

"DEP's Office of Oil and Gas Management will be working to implement STRONGER's recommendations to further protect Pennsylvania's natural resources," Abruzzo said.

To view STRONGER's report, visit the review team's website at <http://www.strongerinc.org/>.

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