

## **Emergency Services, Planning for the Marcellus**

*This column is presented weekly by the Public Education sub-committee of the Clinton County Natural Gas Task Force in an effort to provide accurate, up-to-date information on activities surrounding the Marcellus Shale formation and the natural gas exploration industry.*

With an increasing focus on the various concerns associated with exploration of the Marcellus Shale for natural gas, the public safety sector of Clinton County continues to move forward in its mission to save lives and protect property. The difference now being, we are preparing for the delivery of services to those working in the remote portions of Clinton County as part of the gas industry.

In an effort to prepare for potential emergencies at well sites, Clinton County's Natural Gas Task Force has created a Public Safety Committee. This committee is comprised of people from various public safety organizations within Clinton County, along with representatives from State agencies and the gas industry. The primary focus is to collaboratively work toward the safe exploration and extraction of natural gas resources.

Since the Public Safety Committee's inception in March of this year, three areas of interest have been identified: well site locations, transportation hazards and information sharing.

The initial issue relevant to public safety centered around the ability to be able to physically locate the various well sites should there be an emergency at one of the locations. At first glance the number of permits issued for wells in Clinton County and the potential need to provide a physical address for each of these permitted sites was alarming. After engaging in dialog with industry, it rapidly became clear the task in front of us would not be as daunting as originally anticipated, simply because of how the permitting process works and the close proximity of the locations permitted. By having open dialog with industry and Clinton County's revision to its 9-1-1 Address ordinance, the process needed to insure this important priority to the public safety community has been greatly enhanced and streamlined.

The second issue of great interest was and will continue to be transportation hazards. As industry continues to grow, there is increased traffic in remote areas of our county, where we do not customarily see it. Specifically, this includes the large trucks, which are hauling the various equipment, supplies and goods needed to support the drilling and completion phases of gas exploration. A portion of the focus for this particular concern is geared toward planning and preparedness. At its most serious point, a motor vehicle accident involving a tractor trailer hauling heavy equipment and supplies rapidly turns into a very labor intensive public safety operation requiring a great deal of people and in some instances specialized equipment. There are certainly those situations requiring specialized equipment not immediately available, but this obstacle in most cases can be overcome through proper planning and the use of mutual aid response with one or numerous emergency service groups. Motor vehicle accidents involving large trucks and tractor trailers, is not anything new for the emergency service providers here in Clinton County. We are simply beginning to see them in remote, rural areas with limited access. This requires a more immediate need for resources because of the amount of time and distance needed to access these remote locations.

In addition to identifying and locating sites, as well as transportation hazards, the need for sharing of information is equally important. The Clinton County Department of Emergency Services has implemented a protocol in order to share information with the public safety community when there is information to be shared that is specific to the natural gas industry. With the gas industry being a new area of interest to us, the protocol is one subject to change as we grow and learn more about the processes associated with natural gas drilling. However, we are working to share this information in a timely manner through the use of technology.

The natural gas industry is not new to Clinton County. But it is something that has surfaced on a larger scale and expanded to other portions of our community, resulting in new opportunities, challenges and concerns. These opportunities, challenges and concerns will have impacts on every aspect of our society, including public safety. By establishing a relationship with the gas industry our Public Safety Committee has developed a platform for the productive exchange of information and created an opportunity to air our concerns regarding public safety. Much like any other industry or business, the natural gas industry has its inherent opportunities for something to go wrong and cause personal injury, loss of property and/or harm to the environment. We are hopeful that through our open dialog with industry and a universal interest in safety, we are able to reduce the potential for such situations to occur. However, should a situation arise, the planning and preparedness efforts achieved through collaboration with industry will help to greatly reduce the potential for loss of life, destruction of property and impact to the environment.

Members of the Public Safety Committee include: Kevin Fanning, Clinton County Department of Emergency Services (*Committee Chairman*), William Frantz, and Chad Savrock from Clinton County Department of Emergency Services, Jim Watson and Dan Ake from the Clinton County GIS Department, Jim Crays with the Clinton County Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC), Gerard Banfill from Lock Haven Emergency Medical Services, Megan Lucas, Goodwill Hose Co. Ambulance Service, Suzy Watson, Beech Creek, Blanchard Fire Co. Ambulance, Rusty Blessard, Bucktail Medical Center, Keith Bitner, Beech Creek Vol. Fire Co., James “Butch” Knauff, Citizens Hose Co., South Renovo, William McCoy, Haneyville Vol. Fire Co., Brandon Coleman, Woolrich Vol. Fire Co., Steve Stevenson, Lock Haven City Council, Representatives from the PA Department of Environmental Protection, the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and the PA State Police, and representatives from Anadarko Petroleum Corporation and Range Resources.

*Kevin Fanning is the director of the Clinton County Department of Emergency Services.*

