

RADON GAS IN YOUR HOME

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It's a crying shame. After two solid years of tireless grassroots activism to alert the people of New York City and its public officials about the hazards of the proposed Spectra pipeline, (also known as the "New Jersey-New York Expansion Project") this natural gas pipeline will go online as of November 1, 2013. At that point, your stove, boiler or laundromat is more likely to be burning "fracked" gas from Pennsylvania's Marcellus Shale formation containing higher levels of radon.

Sane Energy Project, a small but energetic group birthed by the news of an imminent pipeline coming into the city, was the first to get the word out about Spectra Energy and its plans to install an oversized, 30"-42" high-pressure gas pipeline inserted into the heart of Manhattan's West Village at Gansevoort Peninsula near West 14th Street.

For the past two years, activists have been very busy. Led by Sane Energy Project and groups such as United for Action, Occupy the Pipeline, New York City Friends of Clearwater, Sierra Club's New York chapter and others, volunteers have stood at the Spectra site and on street corners in the meatpacking district and beyond to hand out flyers, stage protests and conduct non-violent direct actions (resulting in 8 arrests), held community forums, film screenings, panel discussions, and testified at hearings to alert city dwellers and public officials about the extreme dangers posed by this pipeline.

There is good reason to be afraid of this pipeline. Spectra Energy's safety record is abysmal, with a very long rap sheet of leaks, accidents and devastating explosions, while concurrently being excluded from provisions of the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts. In June 2011, the DOT Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) inspectors cited Spectra Energy for 17 inadequacies in its pipeline safety operations and procedures, including problems with pipeline surveillance, emergency plans and welding procedures. PHMSA has jurisdiction over a mere 174,000 miles of interstate lines, and only 7% of pipelines are subject to mandatory inspection. For Spectra Energy's NJ-NY Expansion Project, inspection is proposed just once in 7 years. On average, nationwide pipeline accidents result in one death every 3 weeks and injuries or burns once or more per week.

Yet Another Pipeline?

The purpose of the pipeline is to bring natural gas from the Marcellus Shale formation and its Pennsylvania gas fields for use in New York City's stoves, boilers, power stations and laundromats. Since the Marcellus layer has a high uranium and radium content, the gas derived from the process known as hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking" — highly destructive and toxic in its own right — adds insult to injury by carrying with it the radioactive element radon. And since the travel time from neighboring PA to NY is brief, the radon in the fracked gas does not have sufficient time to decay. Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer in non-smokers and, like asbestos, is highly carcinogenic when inhaled in even minute quantities.

Here in NYC, the timing of the Spectra pipeline opening coincides with the city's new heating oil rules, which mandate that buildings using number 6 fuel oil switch to lighter fuel oils, biodiesel or to natural gas. Gas conversions are a much more costly process than the other options and require

additional transmission and pipeline networks. The Bloomberg administration, in its PlaNYC program, along with New York State Energy Research and Development Association (NYSERDA) and Consolidated Edison, which will deliver the gas, have been promoting the so-called benefits of “clean-burning” natural gas.

At the same time, they dangle the carrot of its current low price to encourage building owners to convert their boilers to burn gas, conveniently not mentioning the expectation that gas prices will inevitably rise. Thus, the long-term industry scheme is to export the gas to places like China, India and Europe, where prices are much greater, leading to soaring profits.

Boiler conversions will help drive the market for hydrofracked gas and encourage fracking to begin in earnest in New York State. This is why New York is now experiencing a proliferation of gas infrastructure projects statewide, with a bevy of pipelines, compressor stations, condensate tanks and liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals, which would prepare the gas for overseas transport, either currently online or still in the proposal process.

The Race Is On

Meanwhile, the oil and gas industry enjoys government subsidies and exemptions from liability due to accidents, spills, damages and clean up costs, courtesy of the Bush and Cheney administration’s 2005 Energy Policy Act. So the race to drill is on full tilt. As is often the case, the public will bear the brunt of environmental, health, safety and financial burdens in support of private-industry profit.

Two lawsuits oppose the Spectra pipeline. One is being brought by Sierra Club, Food & Water Watch, No Gas Pipeline, and the City of Jersey City against the FERC (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission) for approving the pipeline without examining the radon and other issues. A second lawsuit, waged by Sane Energy Project and five other environmental and community groups, against the Hudson River Park Trust (HRPT) for granting the easement to Spectra Energy is under appeal. Although both legal actions are still pending, this does not prevent the pipeline from going online and delivering its toxic contents to NYC residents.

What You Can Do

State Assemblywoman Linda Rosenthal has a radon bill, A6863, which requires utilities statewide to monitor and mitigate radon before delivery to consumers (the State Senate same-as is S4921, is sponsored by Staten Island Senator Diane Savino). We urge citizens to support this bill. Call your state Assembly and Senate representatives and urge them to support this bill. Rep. Rosenthal calls upon us to “inundate” electeds with calls to action.

Manhattan Borough President candidate, Gale Brewer is working with the City Council to see what it can do to require radon testing. Her goal is to propose a resolution in the City Council. Call your councilmembers and urge them to support this resolution: council.nyc.gov.

Get Involved

Visit www.saneenergyproject.org and find several areas you can plug into. In January, Sane Energy Project will begin its third annual citizen’s radon testing program, to continue monitoring and measuring radon in city kitchens.

To donate to Sierra Club’s ongoing legal action against Spectra visit the New York Chapter’s website: <http://newyork2.sierraclub.org/content/donate>. Be sure to indicate you want the money designated for the Spectra suit.

With a mobilized mass movement, we can turn the tide on hydrofracking, the gas infrastructure build-out, dirty energy and climate change. But we need everyone’s participation. Make the calls

to your representatives. Ask them to promote the Rosenthal bill, conservation and efficiency programs, and clean renewable energy now, such as from wind, solar and geothermal.

Thank you.

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