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Kate Sinding's Blog

Yet another serious potential impact that must be evaluated before new fracking goes forward in NY

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A new study out of the University of Buffalo concludes that hydraulic fracturing (aka "fracking") causes uranium naturally trapped inside the Marcellus Shale to be released.

Said the lead researcher for the study, Tracy Bank, Ph.D., assistant professor of geology in UB's College of Arts and Sciences:

"Marcellus shale naturally traps metals such as uranium and at levels higher than usually found naturally, but lower than manmade contamination levels . . . My question was, if they start drilling and pumping millions of gallons of water into these underground rocks, will that force the uranium into the soluble phase and mobilize it? Will uranium then show up in groundwater?"

The answer, she and colleagues found, is yes. This poses two risks: one from solubilized uranium that is released and allowed to migrate subsurface, and the other from uranium contained in drilling wastewater – which is already extraordinarily toxic and for which no treatment facilities are currently permitted in New York State.

While Bank says uranium "is not a radioactive risk, it is still a toxic, deadly metal."

This latest finding – which appears nowhere in the draft environmental review prepared by the state on fracking – points up yet again the overwhelming need to ensure that New York goes slow when it comes to new gas drilling in the Marcellus Shale. We simply don't have all the facts yet, much less do we understand all the risks and whether, and if so how, they can be managed. Until we have all the facts, we should just say no.

Tell the Assembly to come back after the election and vote to approve a moratorium on any new fracking in New York unless and until we know it can be done safely.