



-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-

- [Home](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [People](#)
- [Features](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Govt.](#)
- [Forum](#)
- [Schools](#)
- [PSA](#)
- [Calendar](#)
- [History](#)

For your convenience, we have installed the link below to make donations to this website easier. Now you can utilize your PayPal account or your credit card.

[Make a Donation](#)

- [Government](#)
- [Schools](#)
- [People](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Features](#)
- [History](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Forum](#)
- [Calendar](#)
- [Classified Ads](#)
- [Home](#)

We also have a [Business Card Page](#).
Click [here](#).

The Marcellus Watch



Disposing of hazardous wastewater is proving to be quite a challenge for companies that drill for natural gas. So when three tractor trailers carrying “residual waste” passed through Schuyler County this week, journalist Peter Mantius followed them to see where they dumped.

Left: Peter Mantius

Chasing ‘Residual Waste’

By Peter Mantius

BURDETT, Aug. 14 -- One morning this week, as I was driving south on Route 14 into Watkins Glen, I was alarmed to see three gas drilling wastewater trucks caravanning north. Each one had Pennsylvania plates.

Were they empty or full? Were they carrying hydrofracking waste from across the border or some less toxic concoction?

Where were they going to dump?

I made a quick U-Turn to follow them and find out. Knowing the extreme steps gas drillers sometimes take to get rid of their fracking flowback, I was curious.

Tractor trailers that haul gas drilling wastewater are fairly easy to spot. Typically, they are long narrow cylinders -- often red -- plainly labeled "residual waste." I've seen them by the dozen around the heavily hydrofracked hills of northern Pennsylvania.

But they're much less common in the Finger Lakes because the process known as hydraulic fracturing is still banned in New York State.



The process, in which millions of gallons of water are blasted with sand and chemicals into shale, is the key to unlocking the gas trapped in the Marcellus Shale formation, the richest natural gas source in the region.

Modern high-volume hydrofracking differs in two important ways from conventional gas drilling, which has been conducted locally for decades without the widespread problems.

First, hydrofracking requires up to 5 million gallons of water per well, and then it produces up to 1 million gallons of toxic flowback. Conventional drilling requires a tiny fraction of that water, and it produces a tiny fraction of the flowback. (It also yields far less gas.)

Second, hydrofracking involves the use of special, dangerous chemicals that aren't used in conventional drilling. Drillers aren't required to share the exact contents of this chemical mix, so they don't.

Both hydrofracking and conventional drilling produce hazardous flowback. Both are extremely salty, and are laced with heavy metals and may be radioactive. But hydrofracking flowback is especially toxic because it also includes the special fracking chemicals.

Gas drillers claim they recycle most fracking flowback. Where does the residue from repeated recycling go?

Mostly it's held in lined ponds next to fracked wells. Sometimes it's trucked away. Where to?

Almost any back road will do, according to Pat Farnelli of Dimock, Pa., where hydrofracking is particularly intense. She told me she'd watched wastewater truckers dump their loads on Carter Road, the gravel byway that passes in front of her house.

"It smelled like diesel fuel and dead bluefish," Farnelli said. "It was bubbly. It slicked the road. Its bubbles had rainbows and they didn't pop quickly like water bubbles.

"They seemed to always dump right before it rained. They told us it was for dust control.

After (the HBO documentary) 'Gasland' mentioned it, they stopped doing it.”

In fact, Pennsylvania’s Department of Environmental Protection has issued 154 citations since early 2008 for the illegal dumping of drilling waste in streams and fields and on roads.

The agency also quarantined 28 head of cattle in June after they came in contact with fracking wastewater that had leaked out of a holding pond in a farmer’s field. “Cattle are drawn to the taste of salty water,” the DEP explained. Since 2008, the agency has issued 268 citations for faulty fracking wastewater ponds.

Each of the many hundreds of wells that have been hydrofracked in Pennsylvania over the past two years produce up to one million gallons of toxic flowback. To move all the wastewater from just one well would require a caravan of some 200 trucks.

As I tracked my three-truck convoy along the west side of Seneca Lake past Dresden north toward Geneva, I recalled that earlier this year, Chesapeake Energy Corp. had sought permission to dump some of its fracking flowback from Pennsylvania into an abandoned gas well next to Keuka Lake. But after residents of Pulteney and several Keuka Lake winery owners exploded in protest, the company dropped the project.

So, I mused, if that stopgap plan had failed, was my small convoy part of some other industry dumping plan?

When we reached Geneva, the trucks -- one red, two white -- turned onto Routes 5 and 20, heading east.

I suspected that their destination was the Seneca Falls landfill only a few miles to the northeast. Nope.

They continued heading east. Good thing I had plenty of gas and didn’t need a bathroom stop.

At one stoplight, I pulled up next to the third truck. The decal on the driver’s door said Dragon Products/Shutterhouse, Pa./Gas Field Specialists. It gave a phone number with an 814 area code. All three trucks displayed Dragon’s red logo.

I decided to pass the third truck to eliminate any chance I’d lose the group at a red light.

The trucks finally turned on their left turn signals in the town of Auburn, roughly 55 miles from where I’d started following them.

They twisted and turned along local roads and finally pulled in to the City of Auburn Water Pollution Control Plant.

As they queued up to unload, I headed to the plant’s office. The door had a security keypad, but it was cracked, so I walked in.

A clerk agreed to introduce me to the plant’s chief operator, Jeffrey Sikora, who seemed wary but cooperative.

I asked Sikora if his plant accepted fracking wastewater from Pennsylvania. No, he said. Absolutely not.

For a decade the Auburn plant had accepted wastewater from New York gas wells, he added. It earned more than \$800,000 last year from the practice and recently raised its rates by 60 percent.

Only occasionally does it accept a load from Pennsylvania -- and those aren't fracking fluids, Sikora added.

He referred me to a standard form the Auburn plant requires wastewater haulers to fill out and sign. The form said in bold underlined capital letters: "No frac water from horizontal drilling is allowed. No discharge of drilling mud is allowed."

Does anyone verify that by taking samples from each truck?

No, Sikora said, the plant monitors the water after it's been processed.

But the plant doesn't even filter the salt out of the briny waste fluid. It's not a desalinization plant. It simply dilutes it before releasing it into the Owasco River, which flows north into the Erie Canal and to Lake Ontario.

The plant's policy is to accept no more than 90,000 gallons of gas well wastewater a day -- roughly half of what state and federal regulators allow, according to the Auburn Citizen newspaper. The average daily flow through the plant is 8 million gallons.

So, well wastewater is being dumped into our state waterways at a ratio on the order of 1-100. And no one is verifying that it's not something worse -- fracking flowback.

On my way out of the plant, I noticed the three truckers I'd followed for more than an hour. They were standing beside their trucks as they simultaneously dumped their loads.

"Where are you all hauling from?" I asked.

"From Anschutz in Big Flats," one of them said.

When I got home, I checked the state Department of Environmental Conservation's well database and found a new well licensed to Anschutz Exploration Corp. of Denver.

The well is more than 12,000 feet deep, reaching down into the Trenton-Black River formation. On its way down, drillers passed through the much richer Marcellus formation, the prime target for drillers in the region. But the state has a moratorium on hydrofracking in the Marcellus shale, and until that's lifted the Marcellus is effectively off limits.

But Anschutz may be simply positioning itself for a Marcellus play. In the state database, the questions about the type of well, the well's status, the "producing formation" and gas "field" are all marked as "confidential."

Photo in text: This tractor trailer carrying "residual waste" passed by Peter Mantius' home on Route 414 in Burdett last month.

Peter Mantius (pmantius@gmail.com) was a financial, legal and political reporter at The Atlanta Constitution for 17 years and editor of two business weeklies in the Northeast.

Note: This is the 12th column by Peter Mantius, To see his first column, click [here](#). To see his second column, click [here](#). To see his third column, click [here](#). To see his fourth

column, click [here](#). To see his fifth column, click [here](#). To see his sixth column, click [here](#). To see his seventh column, click [here](#). To see his eighth column, click [here](#). To see his ninth column, click [here](#). To see his 10th column, click [here](#). To see his 11th column, click [here](#).

© The Odessa File 2010
Charles Haeffner
P.O. Box 365
Odessa, New York 14869

E-mail publisher@odessafile.com