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PADEP Studies Air Quality at Marcellus Shale Sites in SW PA

PADEP recently issued a report on the short-term air quality impacts from Marcellus Shale operations in Southwest PA. The five-week study was conducted near several Marcellus Shale natural gas operations in Greene and Washington counties.

PADEP's assessment focused on concentrations of VOCs, including benzene, toluene and xylene, which are typically found in petroleum products. The department also sampled for other pollutants including carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide near natural gas extraction and processing sites.

The air monitoring surveys near natural gas operations were conducted at a wastewater impoundment, tank farm and two compressor stations. Those surveys detected the main constituents of natural gas—including methane, ethane, propane and butane—as well as low levels of associated compounds, including benzene and n-hexane, which were detected infrequently at the tank farm and at a compressor station. Higher concentrations of the main constituents of natural gas were detected mainly near the compressor stations.

DEP is conducting similar air monitoring studies near Marcellus gas facilities in other areas of Pennsylvania to determine if there is a consistent statewide emissions profile for air contaminants near natural gas operations. All studies are expected to be complete in January 2011. Since 2005, 2,300 Marcellus Shale wells have been drilled in Pennsylvania.

To view the report, visit www.depweb.state.pa.us and click on “Regional Resources,” then on “Southwest Region” and choose the “Community Information” link on the right side of the page.