Participants needed for groundwater study near injection wells

By SAMANTHA NELSON Messenger Staff Journalist  Jan 25, 2017

COOLVILLE — Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs is searching for property owners to participate in a study of groundwater from active groundwater wells located near underground injection wells in southeastern Athens County.

Athens County Fracking Action Network (ACFAN), Torch CAN DO and Buckeye Forest Council have also partnered with the Voinovich School for the study, funded by The Sugar Bush Foundation.

The study will document groundwater quality conditions in the flow paths near the wells with the purpose of measuring environmental conditions and monitoring water quality conditions in the area.

The study is interested in plumbed groundwater wells used for both domestic and agricultural purposes. Three water samples will be taken from each well in the spring, summer and fall of this year.
In order to conduct the study, the Voinovich School requires the permission of property owners who have active water wells near the Atha well on Route 144 and the K&H Partners wells just off Route 50 and Route 7 in Torch.

The Atha and K&H wells are both Class II underground injection control (UIC) wells that are used for the disposal of waste from deep-shale drilling and hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. According to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources website's page on UIC, the injection wells accept “brines and other fluids associated with oil and gas production, and hydrocarbons for storage.”

Oil-field brine, according to ODNR, is a saline byproduct that can be more than six times as salty as seawater. The salinity, or dissolved content, of oil-field brines from Ohio vary depending on geologic formations and regionally.

But the waste doesn't contain just salt — other chemicals, such as barium, bromide, chloride — are also often found in fracking waste. Class II injection wells can also contain waste with toxic chemicals such as strontium, mercury, arsenic and radioactive radium.

Summit Laboratories in Cuyahoga Falls will conduct the data analysis of the water samples, which will include three tier packages that test for chemicals.

Tier 1 will test for barium, chloride, magnesium, potassium, sodium, strontium, sulfate, total dissolved solids, total alkalinity and pH levels; Tier 2 will test for calcium, hardness, iron, manganese, conductivity, total suspended solids (TSS) and bromide; and Tier 3 will test for BTEX (benzene, toluene, ethyl benzene and xylene) and dissolved methane.

Once the study is concluded, its results will be accessible to the public on the Voinovich School website in the summer of 2018 at www.watersheddata.com. All personal information from participants will be protected.

Part of the study's recruitment process was an informational session and demonstration on groundwater by the Voinovich School in the Coolville United Methodist Church on Saturday. The session also offered potential participants in the groundwater study to ask questions about the study and if they were qualified to participate.

Informational sessions like Saturday's are occasionally held for those who are interested in learning more about injection wells and potential impacts. Locals are worried about the potential of the waste contained within the injection wells contaminating the groundwater supply.

“What our goal is for the community is to educate,” said Felicia Mettler, a member of Torch CAN DO. “You cannot fight for or against something if you know nothing about it.”

Those who are interested in participating in the study can contact Jennifer Bowman, the interim director of environmental programs for the Voinovich School at (740) 593-3101 or through email at bowmanj2@ohio.edu. Participants will need to turn in a right-of-entry form by Feb. 15.

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