



REFORM JEWISH VOICE
OF NEW YORK STATE

UNION FOR REFORM JUDAISM
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Joseph Martens, Commissioner
NY State Department of Environmental Conservation
625 Broadway
Albany, NY 12233

Dear Commissioner Martens,

We submit these comments which support an indefinite moratorium on hydraulic fracturing (hydrofracking) in New York State on behalf of Reform Jewish Voice of New York State (RJV). RJV is the social justice advocate of the Reform Jewish Movement in the state. RJV promotes state legislation and governmental actions that address the root causes of social and economic injustice and advance religious tolerance and human dignity throughout the state. RJV educates Reform Jews about the critical issues facing our state and helps congregations and individuals advocate, based on the principles of the Reform Jewish Movement, in local communities and Albany.

Jewish tradition emphasizes that human dominion over nature does not provide a license to abuse the environment; rather we are called to “till and tend” God’s Earth (Genesis 2:5), and reminded in the Midrash that if we fail to do so, there will be nobody after us to repair our damage (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13). The Talmudic Law of Bal Tashchit, do not destroy, derived from Deuteronomy 20:19 paired with our “till and tend” mandate, emphasizes the need to act as guardians of our environment, ensuring a safe world for ourselves and a clean and productive future for our children.

For more than forty years, the Reform Movement has advocated in defense of our environment and all those species—from the smallest creatures to humankind itself—that rely on our shared natural habitat and resources for survival. It is our sacred duty as Jews to take action to alleviate environmental degradation and its negative impacts. We believe there are many unanswered questions about the protection of our environment and safety of our residents that must be answered before approval of hydrofracking should be considered.

As residents, we are pleased that New York is the only state that imposed a moratorium on high-volume hydraulic fracturing (hydrofracking) in the extraction of natural gas. The moratorium protects all residents of the state during the period of study and consideration of this process and its impact on clean water, clean air and the health of the populace.

The American Jewish community has for many years advocated action to reduce our nation's reliance on fossil fuels through energy conservation and the development of environmentally sound, non-nuclear energy technologies.

While acknowledging the urgent need to find alternative energy sources to reduce our nation's dependence on fossil fuels and curb the dangerous effects of global warming, RJV believes that the process of hydraulic fracturing must first be proven safe and a clear and complete evaluation of "societal costs and potential long term environmental damage" concluded before a moratorium can be lifted. In addition, proper regulatory standards and monitoring protocols, wastewater disposal methods, drinking water protection and public health measures must be implemented in advance of drilling.

We also recognize the need for sustainable economic development in the state and know that many claims have been made about the economic benefit of hydrofracking. What has been less publicized are the potential economic disincentives---costs for road construction, improvement and repair, costs to local governments, funding needed to provide necessary staff, not only for the Department of Environmental Conservation, but also at the Public Service Commission, Department of Transportation, the Department of Health and maybe other agencies too. Further, stories reported in the media about whether the industry (oil and gas) is overstating the productivity of their wells and size of their reserves, that the U.S. Geological Survey estimated that the Marcellus Shale contains 84 trillion cubic feet, an 80% reduction from the U.S. Energy Department's estimate, nine years ago, of 410 trillion cubic feet, raise questions about the true economic impact of hydrofracking in NYS. And stories about hydrofracking issues and problems in other states (well blowouts, groundwater contamination, earthquake activity) don't ease our concerns.

Governor Andrew Cuomo has said, "Let's get the facts. Let the science and the facts make the decision, not emotion and not politics." We agree. Although state officials say that the process can be conducted safely, we are not confident that all the facts on all aspects of the issue are yet available or that the science has been the guiding principle.

We are concerned that additional funds for study and regulating hydrofracking and gas drilling will not be included in the executive budget, given limited DEC staff resources.

We are pleased that DEC has called for a new economic impact study to look at the costs related to housing, emergency response and other factors left out of the prior study. We support this action.

RJV, therefore, supports an indefinite moratorium on hydrofracking until such time as all the facts are in and we can be assured that the process and byproducts are safe and there will be no environmental or health damages to our communities and residents as a result of hydrofracking.

Sincerely,



Honey Heller & Rabbi Jennifer Jaech
Co-Chairs, Reform Jewish Voice of New York State