

POCONO RECORD

Inspect, improve, monitor gas storage

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A year ago and far away, a nasty methane gas leak began to blight the lives of residents in Porter Ranch, a neighborhood in Los Angeles. Four months passed while people suffered headaches, nosebleeds and nausea. Eventually 8,000 were evacuated before the Southern California Gas Co. finally sealed the Aliso Canyon well in February.

No relevance to Pennsylvanians? Think again. The nation has 400 underground natural gas storage fields, and Pennsylvania has 60 of them. A federal report on the Aliso Canyon leak noted that 80 percent of these underground facilities were built before 1970. While Pennsylvania is among just three states that address well integrity from construction to use and closure/abandonment, the sheer age of the facilities means they have experienced more than 40 years of physical and mechanical stresses without the benefit of modern materials and technology standards.

The U.S. departments of Energy and Transportation worked closely with the EPA and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission on the Aliso Canyon report, offering 44 recommendations aimed at protecting human health and the environment. Now U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz is issuing a call for the industry to meet these new safety recommendations. They call on natural gas companies to phase out "single-point-of-failure well designs" like that at Aliso, adding backup systems or other protective measures to capture gas should a leak occur. Gas storage operators will also have to conduct a detailed evaluation program and set up risk-management plans and a coordinated emergency response plan.

You can view a map showing the scope of natural gas storage in Pennsylvania by visiting the U.S. Energy Mapping System at <http://bit.ly/2enhavV>. Click on "layers" in the right-hand corner, and check off "Natural gas underground storage" to see the dense cluster over the western part of the state.

Lamakers themselves encouraged the Obama administration to create standards in response to the disastrous gas leak in Aliso Canyon. Poor facility design, combined with a lack of monitoring, contributed to the extent of the leak and the time it took to resolve it.

Industry professionals should embrace the recommendations as part of their corporate responsibility as they profit off the Keystone State's wealth of natural gas. Citizens' health and safety should always come before corporate profit.