

# Freudenthal responds to citizen petition on drilling

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CHEYENNE, Wyo. - Gov. Dave Freudenthal says the state must be involved in any independent investigation into the health effects of increased natural gas drilling in southwest Wyoming.

In addition, the process must be driven by the local community, he said in a written response Thursday to a petition by more than 40 citizens in Sublette County calling for an independent agency to assess plans to expand gas drilling in the Pinedale Anticline.

The state Department of Environmental Quality issued a series of ozone warnings for the Pinedale area this winter and spring. Health officials blamed the intense oil and gas activity.

At the same time, the Bureau of Land Management has proposed allowing another 4,400 additional natural gas wells to be drilled in the Pinedale Anticline.

Some county residents say the BLM plan doesn't adequately address potential health consequences of more drilling activity. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency also has voiced concerns about elevated ozone levels, groundwater contamination and decreased visibility from the proposed new drilling.

Freudenthal said in a letter to the petitioners a human health risk assessment "might be appropriate" to address the concerns of local citizens.

But any such assessment must involve the state Department of Environmental Quality and state Department of Health "from a technical and logistical standpoint."

He noted the state DEQ already is working with the oil and gas industry to "assemble a set of emission control strategies and to request the application of additional voluntary emissions reductions to reduce ozone when the potential for exceedances exists."

But Freudenthal also noted that much oil and gas development in Wyoming will occur on federal land, meaning the state will be limited in its ability to control what development is allowed.

"It is my view, and one that I understand might not be shared by some in Sublette County, that our best course forward in such a natural gas-hungry environment is to seek greater emissions controls, wildlife habitat protections and socio-economic stability than we have today with actions like those identified in the Pinedale Anticline Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement," he wrote. The Pinedale SEIS contains the BLM's current recommendation to allow the new drilling.

Freudenthal also noted that the state DEQ and other agencies are holding a public meeting April 21 in Pinedale on the drilling issue.