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Surface Owners, Environmental Council Urge Special Session on Marcellus Drilling

(Charleston, WV) The lack of action taken by the House and the Senate to pass an effective and responsible bill to help regulate Marcellus Shale drilling, has the WV Surface Owners' Rights Organization (WV-SORO), the WV Environmental Council and others urging Acting Governor Earl Ray Tomblin to call a special session to address environmental and other concerns related Marcellus Shale development.

"We appreciate that Governor Tomblin seems willing to give the DEP Office of Oil and Gas additional funding in this year's budget, but DEP Secretary Randy Huffman has been saying for more than a year that his agency does not have the staff or the regulatory structure in place to properly regulate Marcellus Shale drilling," said Don Garvin, Legislative Coordinator for the West Virginia Environmental Council. "Our drilling laws have not been modified in nearly 40 years. There are only 17 inspectors for 59,000 active gas wells. There are 6,000 conventional wells that need to be plugged before the well owners go out of business. We have had at least three major well fires and explosions in the past 18 months. The current system isn't working."

"We are bitterly disappointed that the Governor thinks it is OK to wait until next year to deal with issues like letting drillers put one of these wells 200 feet from our homes, and letting them bury their pit waste on our property," said Dave McMahon, co-founder of the WV Surface Owners' Rights Organization. "And actually we have been waiting 5 years to get legislation to prevent drillers from coming on to our property and surveying the site and road without notifying the surface owner first and offering to meet with them. Is this really too much to ask? Until the legislature puts in place the protections needed for surface owners and the environment, we do not believe that the DEP should be giving out more new permits than it can properly review, inspect and enforce."

"We appreciate that DEP and many legislators, especially the House Judiciary Committee, tried to get something passed. The Senate version of the bill was not as strong as we wanted and we preferred the House version, which provided more protections for surface owners and the environment. We really do not understand why Speaker Rick Thompson took actions that delayed consideration of the bill and caused it to die," said Julie Archer, Project Manager for WV-SORO and WV Citizen Action Group. "Now the Speaker says he believes the issue should be dealt with in a special session. If he is serious about a special session, he should push to make it happen."

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