

Homeland Security in cahoots with fracking gas corporations

By Betsey Piette

Philadelphia

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Evidence that Pennsylvania's Department of Homeland Security is working on behalf of the natural gas industry came to light in early September when internal department bulletins were leaked to an anti-drilling listserv. The department had contracted an Israeli-linked agency to spy on anti-drilling activists.

The story was later leaked to reporters at Pro Publica and the City Paper. These papers' articles suggested a direct connection between the state agency and the natural gas industry. The exposure fueled outrage from targeted groups.

Gov. Ed Rendell had to retreat. On Sept. 14, he held a press conference to apologize to groups who had been monitored. "Protesting is not a threat, it's an American right," said Rendell. He said he was "appalled" and announced that the state would not renew its \$125,000 no-bid contract with the Institute for Terrorism Research and Response, set to expire in October.

ITRR has a post office box address in Philadelphia. It also has strong links to the Israeli spy agency Mossad and the Israeli Defense Force. These institutions are known for their terrorist activities against the Palestinian people, as well as their deadly assault on the aid flotilla attempting to bring supplies to Gaza in May 2010.

The intelligence bulletin ITRR supplied to the state listed as possible terrorist threats protests outside the Israeli Consulate in Philadelphia.

The confidential bulletin suggested that opponents of gas drilling were "violent terrorists" in need of monitoring. The memo combined the word "environmental" with "extremist, militant, and criminal." It warned that "criminals may soon escalate activities" directed at the gas drilling industry.

The bulletin also listed as potential risks demonstrations by anti-war groups, deportation protests in Philadelphia, a gay pride event, activities by Black Power radicals, an animal rights protest and a demonstration in support of the Ft. Dix Five endorsed by the International Action Center.

It advised Homeland Security and FBI agents to monitor environmental actions, including several hearings about Marcellus Shale drilling across the state; a City Council hearing in Pittsburgh, where the industry wants to drill in a public park; and screenings in Philadelphia of the anti-drilling documentary, "Gasland."

A timely error exposes the truth

Office of Homeland Security Director James F. Powers Jr. apparently had the mistaken impression that the listserv which leaked the original bulletin was pro-drilling. He sent a private e-mail that read, in part, "Although an internet forum is certainly a great way to spread the word and receive input from forum participants, it's still in the public domain and thus be accessed by both pro and anti-natural gas drilling folk."

"Please assist us in keeping the information provided in the PIB [informational bulletin] to those having a valid need-to-know. ... We want to continue providing this support to the Marcellus Shale Formation natural gas stakeholders while not feeding those groups fomenting dissent against those same companies."

Former Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge served as the first U.S. secretary of Homeland Security after George W. Bush established the department in 2002. In early August 2010, two consulting firms owned by Ridge signed contracts to serve as strategic advisors to the pro-industry Marcellus Shale Coalition for a hefty \$900,000.

Austin Kelley is an activist with Philadelphia-based Protecting Our Waters, which works to educate the public about health impacts of Marcellus Shale gas drilling. Kelley announced that his organization is calling for a full investigation into exactly what happened and "what role the gas industry played."

Speaking of Rendell's retreat, Kelley said, "Being appalled is not enough." Kelley suggested that an independent inquiry explore whether James Powers, director of Pennsylvania Homeland Security, misused taxpayer dollars in providing lists of anti-drilling activities to private companies drilling in Pennsylvania for profit. (P.O.W. news release Sept. 3)

"The Marcellus Shale industry is paying big bucks to push their drill-hard-drill-fast-before-science-and-regulators-can-catch-up agenda in Pennsylvania," said Amy Wilson of Protecting Our Waters. "Tom Ridge is their best PR tool right now, and we have to wonder whether Ridge in turn used PA Homeland Security as a tool against clean water/public health advocates, as part of a public relations strategy to delegitimize anyone who questions the industry."

Meanwhile the real threat to communities across the state is clear. Earlier in September the Susquehanna River in northeast Pennsylvania began bubbling with methane gas after shale gas drilling operations started within two miles of the river. "We don't know the ramifications of this," local resident Don Palmer told WNEP TV, Channel 16. "All we know is that gas coming out of the river is explosive," said Palmer, who is also an engineer. (P.O.W. news release) The proposed 442-mile Millennium Pipeline, which would deliver natural gas from Canada to New York, snakes through significant portions of the Hudson River Valley, including critical fish and wildlife habitats.

New reports of damaged water wells appear almost daily. The number of explosions of gas wells as well as leaks of fracking water containing toxic, radioactive and carcinogenic chemicals into ponds, creeks and ground water is on the rise.

Fracking is going full tilt in Pennsylvania. Writing in Orion magazine, Sandra Steingraber reports that 14 percent of the land in Ithaca, N.Y., has already been leased for drilling, with 40 percent

leased in surrounding Rockland County and, “In December 2009, ExxonMobil purchased a large natural gas company, a decision widely viewed as a game-changing commitment to fracking technology.” (May/June 2010)

A Pennsylvania-based developer, East Resources, paid \$750 million for rights to 650,000 acres of state forest land in 2009. It recently sold the same rights to Royal Dutch Shell (Shell Oil) for \$4.7 billion.

Between July 2009 and June 2010, the state’s 632 producing Marcellus wells released 180 billion cubic feet of gas — an amount more than double Pennsylvania’s annual natural gas production from the years before the shale exploration began.

With fracking exempt from federal environmental regulations, including the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the Superfund law, the fight for state and local regulatory control is at a critical juncture.

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Terrorist bulletin rankles local man

PA Senator Lisa Baker calls for an investigation

By [FRITZ MAYER](#)

The River Reporter, September 23, 2010, Narrowsburg, NY.

DAMASCUS TOWNSHIP, PA — Bernie Handler couldn’t be 100% sure if the name on the email was ITRR, but that’s what his memory was telling him.

The subject line said Art-Fest. Handler is promoting Art-Fest as a fundraising benefit for Damascus Citizens for Sustainability (DCS), so his email address is displayed on the group’s website.

Handler deleted the four emails that may have been sent by ITRR, and then received 20 or so emails with Arabic names. He deleted the emails without much thought, considering them to be junk mail.

A few days later, the news broke that the Institute of Terrorism Research and Response (ITRR), which prepared intelligence bulletins for the Pennsylvania Department of Homeland Security, was tracking “environmental extremists” as terrorists. The bulletin, released on August 30, listed

Damascus Township as a “potentially impacted area” and listed September 20 as a “date of interest” because of “a hearing in Damascus... on a proposed amendment to zoning regulations regarding drilling.”

After reading that, Handler couldn't help but wonder if those peculiar emails were part of some murky attempt to get him to open one of the emails, and thereby link him and DCS to a terrorist group. And the emails keep coming.

What is also alarming for environmentalists is that it seems that the bulletins were being shared with pro-drilling advocates, but were not intended to be seen by the general public.

In an account of the story in The [Harrisburg] Patriot-News, State Homeland Security Director James Powers told the unidentified woman who went public with the bulletin, “We want to continue providing this support to the Marcellus Shale formation natural gas stakeholders, while not feeding those groups fomenting dissent against those same companies.”

The listing of environmental groups in the bulletin proved to be “embarrassing” to Governor Ed Rendell. He said he cancelled the contract with ITRR as soon as he learned about the bulletin on September 14. The story also caused something of an uproar in Harrisburg with several lawmakers calling for an investigation into the matter.

Senator Lisa Baker, chair of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, which has jurisdiction over homeland security matters, announced that the committee will hold public hearings on the “controversial no-bid contract the state government had with ITRR.”

Baker said in a press release issued on September 17, “People were targeted for no reason other than they were exercising their fundamental rights of free speech and assembly. Beyond that, there seems no justification for sharing this kind of information with the private businesses who received it.”

At the local level, Marian Schweighofer, executive director of the Northern Wayne Property Owners Alliance, sent an email to members saying, “There is reason to believe that the Department of Homeland Security is tracking the anti-drillers as a form of terroristic folks.”

Schweighofer said of the email, “I was simply urging our members to avoid confrontations, even exchanges of banter, as too risky under the circumstances.”

For Handler, to some degree, the damage has already been done. He asked, “What happens now with information that they've [ITRR] already gathered? Information about people who are opposed to gas drilling, or people who may be preservationists, has already been given to gas companies and others, and there is no way to undo that.”

East Germany on the Susquehanna: Pennsylvania Monitors Anti-Drilling ‘Extremists’

Press Action,

September 16, 2010.

An incredible story is emerging in Pennsylvania about state officials working in cahoots with energy companies exploring for natural gas in the state’s portion of the Marcellus Shale formation. [ProPublica](#) and local newspapers in the state are doing excellent work reporting on how Pennsylvania’s Office of Homeland Security has been tracking anti-gas drilling groups and their meetings.



The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* [reported](#) Sept. 16 that State Homeland Security Director James Powers Jr., in a memo leaked to the news media, portrayed a \$125,000 anti-terrorism contract with an entity called the Institute of Terrorism Research and Resources (ITRR) as “helping Marcellus Shale gas companies learn about the actions of environmental activists who oppose deep underground drilling for gas.”

Powers [told](#) the Harrisburg, Pa., *Patriot News* that he has been including anti-gas drilling activist information in his triweekly intelligence briefings for about a month because there have been “five to 10” incidents of vandalism around the state related to the natural gas industry, which is one of the sectors he is charged with monitoring. The briefings are sent to local law enforcement and the owners and operators of “critical infrastructure.”

In an e-mail that he accidentally sent to an anti-drilling resident of Pennsylvania, Powers told the woman the “sensitive information” she had disseminated on a Web site is not meant for the public, but only for those “having a valid need to know. ... We want to continue providing this support to the Marcellus Shale formation natural gas stakeholders, while not feeding those groups fomenting dissent against those same companies.”

Powers reportedly also sent copies of the e-mail to ITRR as well as to Pam Witmer, a lobbyist with the [Bravo Group](#), which lobbies for the gas industry.

Hmm. Is Powers’ mission to protect the security of Pennsylvanians or to protect the profits of natural gas producers operating in the Marcellus Shale? Based on his statements, it appears Powers believes his mandate is to do whatever it takes to make drilling for natural gas in Pennsylvania as seamless and profitable as possible.

Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell has refused to fire Powers but did cancel the one-year contract with ITRR, which was scheduled to expire in October. Rendell [said](#) the institute was supposed to monitor potential “credible” threats to important infrastructure, such as roads and bridges. While natural gas pipelines are designated “critical infrastructure,” oil and gas drilling sites across the United States typically do not fall under the category of “critical infrastructure.”

ITRR [issued](#) a “press statement” Sept. 15 in response to the news articles about its contract with the state. The statement seeks to defend its “research,” but it also appears to serve as a marketing brochure for governments and corporations seeking a third-party to conduct research into “eco-terrorists,” “international jihadists,” “anti-capitalists,” “ecological militants” and “anarchists.”

In the statement, ITRR presented this analysis from July 2010 as an example of why it “has become a trusted provider of actionable intelligence to those who need it most.”

“Eco-extremist, anti-coal mining and anti-capitalist communications of 2010 include explicit calls for everything from more aggressive civil disobedience through sabotage and even murder. Furthermore, the increasing combination and cross-pollination of ecological militants and anarchists is expected to prove increasingly volatile, since, like their environmentalist militant allies, anarchist rhetoric has also seen a shift toward support for extremist action in the past year. In this context, ITRR analysts have observed general anarchist support or sympathy in some circles for the anti-civilization ‘Unabomber’, Ted Kaczinski.”

The press statement is signed by ITRR co-director Michael Perelman. The *Post-Gazette* reports that the institute has offices in Philadelphia and Jerusalem but also contains an “emergency contact” phone number in Washington, D.C. Perelman was a member of the York, Pa., police department for 20 years. His business partner is Aaron Richman, a former Israeli police officer.

Pennsylvania has become a hotspot for government officials and corporations preoccupied with environmental and animal rights activism. Information Network Associates, a private company that investigates the animal rights movement, was scheduled to hold an invite-only conference in Harrisburg on Sept. 14 (it could not be confirmed whether the conference went ahead as planned) titled “Managing Threats from Activist Groups.”

The agenda [included](#) these sessions:

- INA analysts will discuss key animal rights groups operating around the US. Key leaders, tactics, and capabilities will be discussed.
- The INA staff will give an overview of recent infiltrations and the risk they pose to research laboratories. Discussion will include best practices for preventing infiltrations. Activists’ use of social networking sites and how the use of privacy settings may affect investigations will also be discussed.
- Updates will be provided on pending or proposed legislation affecting animal research. The status of recent activist legal cases will also be included. Discussion will be held on activists’ use of the legal system in attack laboratories, researchers and companies.

As for ITRR, it reported in an Aug. 30 bulletin it [prepared](#) for Pennsylvania’s Office of Homeland Security that anti-drilling activists would likely be attending a Sept. 3 screening in Philadelphia of *Gasland*, a documentary that looks at the effects of hydraulic fracturing associated with drilling for natural gas in the Marcellus Shale and other shale plays across the United States. The bulletin also notes that the opening days of Tim DeChristopher’s trial in Salt Lake City “are expected to draw protesters. ... Solidarity rallies are expected elsewhere.”

As Naomi Klein and Bill McKibben [write](#), Tim “pulled off one of the most creative protests against our runaway energy policy in years: he bid for the oil and gas leases on several parcels of federal

land even though he had no money to pay for them, thus upending the auction. The government calls that “violating the Federal Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act” and thinks he should spend ten years in jail for the crime; we call it a noble act, a profound gesture made on behalf of all of us and of the future.”

Stayed tuned for more details. I don't think we've heard the last of Pennsylvania's deal to do the dirty work of the natural gas producers.

‘Environmental extremists’ threaten Pennsylvania drillers

5:19 PM Thu, Sep 09, 2010

Elizabeth Souder/Reporter

When [Exxon Mobil](#) bought XTO, analysts said Exxon was spending its chips on a company with domestic operations that face relatively low political risk. The investment would balance Exxon's investment in high-risk, unstable countries elsewhere on the globe.

I wonder if Exxon executives spent much time with Pennsylvania's environmental extremists before signing the deal?

[According to ProPublica:](#)

As debate over natural gas drilling in the Marcellus shale reaches a fever pitch, state and federal authorities are warning Pennsylvania law enforcement that “environmental extremists” pose an increasing threat to security and to the energy sector.

A confidential intelligence bulletin sent from the Pennsylvania [Department of Homeland Security](#) to law enforcement professionals in late August says drilling opponents have been targeting the energy industry with increasing frequency and that the severity of crimes has increased.

It warns of “the use of tactics to try to intimidate companies into making policy decisions deemed appropriate by extremists,” and states that the [FBI](#) -- the source of some of the language in the Pennsylvania bulletin -- has “medium confidence” in the assessment. A spokesman for the FBI did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Do ‘Environmental Extremists’ Pose Criminal Threat to Gas Drilling?

by [Abrahm Lustgarten](#)

ProPublica, Sep. 8, 2010.

The Patterson-UTI Drilling Company LLC horizontal drilling rig in Chartiers Township, Pa., on April 9, 2010. (Andrew Harrer/Bloomberg via Getty Images)



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The advisory, [a copy of which was obtained by ProPublica](#), doesn’t cite the specific incidents causing concern. It is also unclear from accounts from state law enforcement officials whether the incidents in Pennsylvania posed a substantial threat, or what effect the advisory might have on public gathering and the debate over drilling in the state.

Pennsylvania State Police said there have been only a few isolated crimes involving drilling facilities.

“We haven’t had any incidents of any significance to date where we have identified a problem, or any environmental extremists,” said Joseph Elias, a captain with the Pennsylvania State Police Domestic Security Division, which was not involved in issuing the bulletin.

An aide to Gov. Ed Rendell -- speaking on behalf of the state’s Homeland Security Office -- said the advisory was based on five recent vandalism incidents at drilling facilities, including two in which a shotgun was reportedly fired at a gas facility.

“All this security bulletin does is raise awareness of local officials. It doesn’t accuse anyone of local activity,” said the spokesman, Gary Tuma. “Where the professionals detect a pattern that may pose a threat to public safety, they have a responsibility to alert local law enforcement authorities and potential victims.”

Anti-drilling activists in the state say that public hearings and other events have been peaceful and that they see no evidence of violent opposition. Given the lack of evidence about “extremist” crimes, they say, the bulletin casts drilling opponents as criminals and threatens to stifle open debate.

“It may very well be designed to chill peoples’ very legitimate participation in public decision making,” said Deborah Goldberg, an attorney with Earthjustice, a national group [pressing for stronger environmental protections](#). “If people who have concerns fear that they are going to be treated as a security threat they may very well be afraid to go and express their views.”

The advisory lists a series of public hearings on drilling permit issues across the state as potential flash points. It also mentions a Sept. 3 screening of the anti-drilling film “Gasland” in Philadelphia that went off without incident. Language describes “environmental activists and militants” on one side of the debate and “property owners, mining and drilling companies” on the other.

Finally, the bulletin groups the public hearings and film screening with protest rallies for anarchist clubs focused on “evading law enforcement,” and with a Muslim advocacy group’s rally for the release of suspects in an alleged terror plot at Fort Dix, N.J.

The advisory was sent to state law enforcement and local government groups, as well as businesses with a specific concern addressed in the bulletin. It was not intended to be distributed to the public.

In issuing such an advisory, the government has to walk a fine line between the need to respect the fundamental rights of freedom of speech and the need to keep the public safe, said Nathan Sales, an assistant law professor at George Mason University and a former policy development staffer at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

“The question is how to accomplish the one with minimal consequences to the other,” he said.

A pro-drilling group, the [Marcellus Shale Coalition](#), characterized the vandalism in Pennsylvania as “directed at preventing our industry from safely delivering these resources to Pennsylvanians.”

The group’s president, Kathryn Klaber, said she supported civil debate over drilling, “but to the extent they go in the other direction, and potentially devolve in a manner that undermines our ability to keep our folks safe, then we will have a problem,” she said.