

Shale gas waste might go by barge

Industry seeks approval from Coast Guard

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The shale gas drilling industry wants to use barges to move its potentially toxic wastewater across rivers and lakes to disposal sites across the country, but the U.S. Coast Guard must first decide whether it's safe.

"It may be hazardous," said Commander Michael Roldan, chief of the Coast Guard's Hazardous Material Division.

He told Public Source,

an independent, nonprofit news organization based in Pittsburgh, that the waste can't currently be shipped by barge.

The Coast Guard regulates the nation's waterways. Roldan couldn't say when the agency would decide whether drilling wastewater can be shipped by barge. That's because experts from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Transportation and Energy departments have weighed in, and a committee established by the White House will likely review the proposal.

The oil and gas industry uses water and chemicals to stimulate produc-

tion of natural gas locked in shale, and some of that water comes back to the surface. The industry recycles some of it, and uses trucks to take it to industrial treatment plants or deep injection wells for treatment or disposal.

The waste is mostly water, but can also contain ultra-salty brines, heavy metals, natural radioactivity, and some of the chemicals used to free gas.

Environmentalists said the possibility of a spill that could contaminate Pittsburgh-area rivers isn't worth the risk. A barge accident would be a "massive catastrophe," said Steve Hvozdoich,

Marcellus campaign coordinator for Clean Water Action, a national environmental advocacy organization.

But industry officials who advocate waterway transport said barges are the safest, and cheapest, way to move the wastewater. They counter that other industrial materials, some toxic, are already moved on barges and question why the drilling industry should be treated differently.

The Coast Guard plans to publish its proposal on transporting wastewater in the Federal Register. Then, the public and the industry will have an opportunity to weigh in.

D9C 1/13