



[Buffalo, NY]

Caution Urged Over Treating Fracking Waste In Niagara Falls

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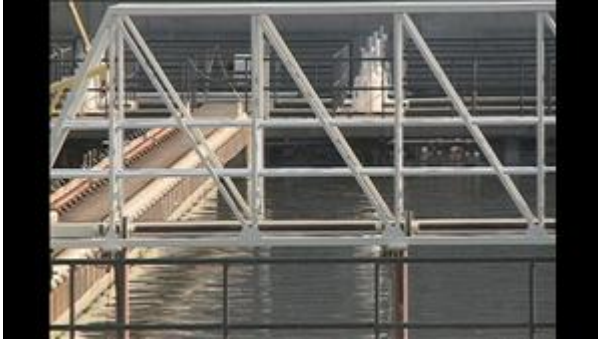
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NIAGARA FALLS, NY - Two On Your Side's confirmation that the Niagara Falls Water Board is moving forward with plans to possibly treat "fracking fluid" at its waste water treatment plant, brought up a lot of concern about the potential impact on our environment from Western New Yorkers, including a number of postings from our Facebook fans.

On Friday, the Executive Director of the Water Board, Paul Drof, said he simply didn't have time in his schedule to sit down for an interview until next week, but urged people not to jump to conclusions in the meantime.

Drof told WGRZ-TV that at this point, all the Water Board is doing is exploring whether its Buffalo Avenue waste water treatment plant could possibly be of use in treating the byproducts of hydraulic fracturing...if or when the state gives approval of using that mining method to extract natural gas from the Marcellus Shale in the state's Southern Tier.



Waste water treatment plant in Niagara Falls, NY

"Until the state finalizes their guidelines on the treatment of fracking waste , we can't say for sure even if we can do it", Drof said.

He also told us part of the reason they are even considering this, is economics.

The waste water treatment plant was built in the late 1970's, to treat the waste water from the numerous chemical plants which once crowded Buffalo Avenue, as well as other part of the city.

Fees for doing so once generated millions of dollars in annual income.

However, Drof says that over the past 25 years, as a number of those plants have closed, industrial revenues for waste water treatment have fallen 48%.

Treating "frack water", if possible, could help make up for the losses and help prevent drastic rate increases for remaining customers.

"Frankly, we have a responsibility to our rate payers to at least look at this as a possibility," Drof said.

Walter Hang, a nationally recognized expert in the field of waste water management who has studied the Niagara Falls waste water plant in the past, believes the answer to whether it can handle frack water can be summed up in two words: No way.

"The waste waters generated by the chemical manufacturing facilities in Niagara Falls are vastly different from the gas drilling waste water that could be generated by horizontal hydrofracking in the Marcellus Shale. The waste water treatment plant in Niagara Falls is simply not designed, constructed, or maintained to take out all of the toxic and radioactive constituents found in gas drilling waste water," Hang said.

Drof says part of what the Water Board is also looking into involves whether the plant could be improved or renovated to handle those substances.

Hang, whose environmental data firm [Toxics Targeting Inc.](#) has consulted many municipalities on their waste water treatment needs, has his doubts.

"In theory it could be retrofitted...no question about it. However, the cost would be enormous," he said.

In the meantime, some fifty scientists from universities throughout the nation have attached their names to a letter to Governor Cuomo urging him not to allow the discharge of any frack water, even treated, into any rivers like the Niagara which provide a source of drinking water.

The letter states: "The presumption appears to be that municipal water filtration plants provide protection from potential contaminants. The best available scientific information does not support this presumption."

NYS Senator Mark Grisanti, who chairs the state senate's committee on the environment, told Channel 2 news that he has seen no plan or study or any sort regarding the treatment of hydraulic fracking waste at the Niagara Falls waste water plant, and until he does it would difficult to comment.

"The fracking waste water must be treated properly to avoid any risks to our health or danger to our Great Lakes. At this time no proposals have been submitted to our office. We are confident that the government will not allow anyone to poison our water. We will keep the public updated and informed on these matters," Grisanti said in a statement released through a spokesperson.

NYS Senator George Maziarz, whose district represents other areas along the Niagara River downstream from where the Niagara Falls plant currently discharges treated waste water, also declined comment citing the need for more information and his desire to hear the thoughts of local officials regarding the plant's possible use in treating frack water.

Niagara Falls Mayor Paul Dyster declined to speak on the topic as well, deferring to the Water Board.

Click on the video player to watch [our story](#) from **2 on Your Side Reporter Dave McKinley** and photojournalist Bill Boyer.

Click [here to read](#) Dave McKinley's latest blog.

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