



WHEELING NEWS REGISTER PHOTO

Drilling mud that infiltrated a Valley Grove home made its way into Little Wheeling Creek also.

OHIO COUNTY

6,000-gallon drilling spill moves house, enters creek

VALLEY GROVE — State regulators are investigating spills from a drilling operation in Ohio County that damaged a house and entered a creek.

More than 6,000 gallons of water and a non-toxic clay mixture called drilling mud from a MarkWest operation entered the basement of Becky and John Wiczorkowski's house in Valley Grove last week, media outlets reported.

Drilling mud from the operation also entered Little Wheeling Creek twice last week Department of Environmental Protection. About 30 fish, mostly minnows, died, spokesman Tom Aluise told The Intelligencer and Wheeling-News Register.

The drilling operation, which crossed under the creek and U.S. 40, is part of MarkWest's pipeline infrastructure in Ohio County. Aluise said that the drilling mud infiltrated natural fractures in the rock and entered the creek.

"It happens," he said. "In the industry they call it inadvertent return."

Becky Wiczorkowski said that 4 feet of drilling fluid and water entered the basement of her house.

"Before I realized what was happening, I saw the living room ceiling separate from the wall and I could see outside," she told the newspaper. "One of the [pipeline] guys told me the house moved off of its foundation and I should get out and stay out."

The cause of the fish kill hasn't been determined. MarkWest and DEP officials say drilling mud is not toxic. But Benjamine Stout, a biology professor at Wheeling Jesuit University, is not convinced.

"The facts do not add up," Stout told the newspaper. "They should do a laboratory sampling [of the drilling mud] and show us the results. That will tell if it is non-toxic."

Aluise said that a large amount of mud concentrated in a small area removes oxygen from the water, and small fish cannot survive in such an environment. MarkWest spokesman Robert McHale

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BECKY WIECZORKOWSKI
Homeowner

said that he believes the fish were trapped in a dry area resulting from workers damming the water upstream and downstream on either side of the drilling mud to contain it. A bypass was created for clean water to flow through the area.

MarkWest will conduct a stream remediation after drilling is completed, Aluise said.

The Division of Natural Resources cited MarkWest in August after a landslide ruptured a natural gas liquids pipeline, causing a fish kill in a tributary of Fish Creek in Wetzel County.

"The Wetzel County accident was an isolated incident and there is no reason to believe it will happen again," McHale said. "As far as the Valley Grove problem, we are doing everything we can to minimize the potential for inadvertent returns to happen again."

McHale said that the company is working with state regulators to resolve the Wetzel County citations. The company also is working to determine what went wrong in the incident involving the Wiczorkowski house.

"Prior to setting up, professional engineers came in and did subsurface investigations," he said. "Every component of the job had been planned out in advance."

Aluise said that the drilling mud entered the basement through an uncased well underneath the house.

MarkWest workers implemented a contingency plan immediately to address the problem and to accommodate the homeowners, McHale said.

— THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NY AG asks judge to unseal Attica riot file

ALBANY, N.Y. — New York's attorney general has asked a state judge to unseal documents about the 1971 riot and

Attica state inmates died — all but four shot by authorities.

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