



Issue Snapshot: Radon Mitigation

Background: Radon is an invisible, odorless, and tasteless substance found in natural gas which dissipates over time.

The alleged health impacts of radon in natural gas have been emphasized by opponents of the Spectra Pipeline which transports hydrofracked natural gas from Pennsylvania and Ohio to the West Village. Spectra's critics argue that because the pipeline transports fuel to New York faster than current sources in Texas and Louisiana, it will increase the chances of radon levels being high enough to pose a health risk.

As a result, anti-hydrofracking activists are supporting legislation that would require utilities to continuously monitor the levels of radon in natural gas. If radon levels reach certain thresholds, the gas utility would be required to implement certain procedures and the Commissioner of the Department of Health would be authorized to shut off the flow of natural gas at any delivery point that does not meet the threshold requirements.

Company Position: Con Edison is opposed to this legislation for several reasons.

First, the issue of radon in natural gas was addressed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (FERC) review of the Spectra Pipeline Project. The FERC assessment concluded that radon in natural gas delivered to New York is low and not likely to pose concerns for customers.

Second, any regulation should occur at the federal level. Currently, there are no industry standards for techniques that change the radon concentration in natural gas that gas distribution utilities could utilize. However, normal gas processing techniques often in place at the wellhead can reduce radon concentrations before the gas is placed into interstate transport pipelines. Because radon mitigation is more easily accomplished in upstream sources, federal entities with jurisdiction over all aspects of natural gas production, transmission, and distribution are the appropriate entities to oversee this process.

Finally, the Commissioner of the Department of Health does not possess the necessary expertise to make determinations that would have such far-reaching impacts on the gas distribution system. For example, shutting off gas supply would have implications for the entire gas distribution system and could lead to customers being without gas for weeks. If a section of the distribution system loses gas pressure, all pilot lights in all homes and businesses would have to be turned off before gas system pressure could be reestablished. Subsequently, all pilot lights and appliances would need to be returned to service by appropriately trained professionals. This would be particularly problematic in the winter months and could potentially violate the Home Energy Fair Practices Act's (HEFPA) service termination provisions.