

Drill Cuttings and Radioactivity: Myth vs. Fact



Anti-fracking groups often claim that hydraulic fracturing and the disposal of drill cuttings exposes people to harmful amounts of radiation. In reality, the handling and disposal of drill cuttings produced during shale development is a highly regulated process that poses minimal radiation risk to humans or the environment.

“Drill cuttings managed on the drill site are regulated by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR).”
(ODNR, January 2014)

“[T]he average chest X-ray emits 4,000 microrem, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, which is **600 times the radiation found in the drill cuttings.**”
(Youngstown Vindicator, January 2012)

“NORM can and should be disposed of in landfills, said {David Lipp at the Ohio Department of Natural Resources’ Bureau of Radiation Protection}, who added that low levels found in the drill cuttings is **not a public-health concern.** ‘It’s like being afraid of getting hit by a truck and then having a Hot Wheels car hit your foot,’ he said.”
(Youngstown Vindicator, January 2012)

“Anyone wanting to use drill cuttings off-site for fill or other beneficial uses, must first obtain approval for these uses from Ohio EPA’s Division of Materials and Waste Management. Drill cuttings may be recycled or reused at the well pad, or associated oil and gas facilities, if approved by ODNR.”
(ODNR, January 2014)

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- David Lipp
Ohio Department
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“The idea of drill cuttings being a risk from a radiologic standpoint, we’re just not seeing that.”
(Steve Helmer, Ohio Department of Natural Resources Bureau of Radiation Protection, January 2012)

“DEP’s data indicates that less than half a percent of all drill cuttings produced by the Marcellus Shale industry in 2012 that were disposed of in landfills triggered radiation monitors. The cuttings **did not contain levels of radioactivity that would be harmful to the public,** and they were safely disposed of in the landfills.”
(Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection [PADEP], January 2013)

“Current industry practices are such that **data do not indicate the public or workers face any health risk** from exposure to radiation from these materials [cuttings].” *(PADEP, January 2013)*

“This stuff [cuttings] is so innocuous that under law and regulation and good environmental practice, it could be [buried] at the drill site. It could be left right there.”
(Scott Foti, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, May 2011)



“My message is simple—this stuff is not toxic. **It’s no more radioactive than the soil in your garden and bricks on your house.** All this testing verifies that. This is way below any EPA levels. This would be equivalent to taking dirt from your backyard and using it in landfill. It can be used for cover. It’s that safe.”
(Tom Santulli, Chemung County (NY) Executive, April 2010)