

Pipeline compressor station proposed in Upper Bucks

Barrie-John Murphy

A quiet country road off Route 309 could soon be the site of a noisy compressor station.

Pipeline operator Adelphia Gateway wants to expand an existing site on Rich Hill Road bordering Richland and West Rockhill townships to include the station, one of two new facilities proposed along the route of its natural gas pipeline from Northampton County to the port of Marcus Hook near Philadelphia.

Compressor stations are generally placed every 40 to 70 miles along a pipeline route to maintain a constant pressure on the gas and to remove any liquids or solids that accumulate during transport.

In a presentation to Upper Bucks residents last week, Eve Miari of the Clean Air Council said because the state was actively trying to become a gas exporter, the Philadelphia area's dense network of pipelines could become even denser.

Miari pointed out the engines that keep the compressor stations functioning also bring with them a lot of noise, which she compared to four diesel locomotive engines running 24-7. Citing a New York state study, Miari said residents nearby, and those even a mile away, would hear the noise, which operators typically mitigate by installing mufflers.

Miari also cited some negative effects of intended or unintended chemical emissions on residents in the vicinity of the stations, including nausea, throat and eye irritation and sinus problems, as well as more severe health issues such as thyroid and heart problems and asthma.

There was one bright spot, she noted. The 1.8-acre Quakertown Compressor Station's units would be powered by electricity, a significantly cleaner, healthier alternative to gas-powered facilities.

In 2017, Durham Township adopted an ordinance placing restrictions on

compression stations because of the proximity of the proposed PennEast pipeline.

"We have an opportunity to regulate them. We can't regulate after the fact," said Ariana Elinich of Springfield Township's Environmental Advisory Council. That township, which lies along the proposed 84-mile route, filed a legal response last month with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission outlining possible negative environmental impacts.

Elinich called for the response period, which closed June 1, to be extended in order to give more Bucks residents, directly impacted or not, a chance to weigh in.

A map of the Delaware Valley shows the area's pipelines, specifically those cutting through Upper Bucks.

