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## Wetzel residents to discuss road safety in midst of natural gas boom

By Kate Mishkin Staff writer Apr 18, 2018

A county that's found itself in the middle of a natural gas development boom is urging lawmakers to make roads safer.

Wetzel County's Oil and Gas Task Force will be holding a meeting 10 a.m. Friday to tell local lawmakers about the threat drilling and construction activities pose to the region's roads.

"The state basically was very anxious to get them in here, for good reason – there's a lot of money involved. The problem is they didn't prepare the infrastructure to support all the activity," said Ray Renaud, chairman of the road safety committee, a subcommittee of the oil and gas task force.

The committee is made up of 10 members, including a representative from Wetzel County Schools, the Wetzel County Sheriff's Office and EQT, a Pittsburgh-based natural gas company in charge of the Mountain Valley Pipeline. When completed, the 303-mile-long Mountain Valley Pipeline will begin in Wetzel County and end in Pittsylvania County, Virginia. One of three compressor stations will be in Wetzel County.

The oil and gas task force is part of the Wetzel County Office of Emergency Services.

Hundreds of trucks pass through the county's windy roads daily, Renaud said, which could damage the roads or make it difficult for emergency crews to get anywhere.

He's hoping the West Virginia Department of Transportation's Division of Highways will act on a number of proposals to make roads safer, including requiring development companies to use "best practices." He'll be presenting on those topics at the meeting Friday, which is open to the public. Aside from the major pipeline projects, there's plenty of drilling and gathering lines in the county, he said.

He said state senators Mike Maroney, R-Marshall, and Charles Clements, R-Wetzel, had committed to attend. Gov. Jim Justice's office said a representative would attend.

The Division of Highways, he said, declined to attend. Renaud said he was hopeful the department would look over his proposals anyway.

The meeting will be at the Wetzel County 4-H Mollohan Center at 10 a.m. Friday.

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