

Minister says Poland to produce shale gas next year

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Workers change pipes at Consol Energy Horizontal Gas Drilling Rig exploring the Marcellus Shale outside the town of Waynesburg, United States, on April 13, 2012.

Poland will begin commercial production of shale gas next year, the Deputy Environment Minister said Wednesday, becoming the first European country to use the controversial technique known as fracking.

"After the results which I just saw, the first commercial exploitation will begin in Poland next year," Piotr Wozniak was quoted as saying by the Polish news agency PAP after the company San Leon Energy published further results from a test well.

The London-listed company said in a statement that the refracturing of a well initially drilled this summer in the north of Poland "has far exceeded expectations".

Testing to determine how much gas was produced by the well is still ongoing, however, and the company plans to drill another test well in the region.

"The results are very good," said the junior minister, saying he hoped other companies would be in a position to begin commercial exploitation of the reserves next year.

Poland and Lithuania are the only two EU countries which are pushing forward with exploration and quick commercial extraction of shale gas reserves using hydraulic fracturing.

The technique consists of pumping water and chemicals at high pressure into deep rock formations to free oil and gas, but environmentalists warn the process can contaminate ground water.

Concerned about its energy security, Poland hopes to exploit its [shale gas](#) reserves estimated at between 800 and 2,000 billion cubic metres.

The central European country of 38 million currently imports about two-thirds of the 14 million cubic metres of natural gas it uses annually from Russia.

Plentiful natural gas would also potentially allow Poland to reduce its

reliance on dirty domestic coal for 90 percent of its electricity production, a situation that has caused tensions with European partners concerned about missing clean air targets.

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