

**ENVIRONMENTAL  
HEALTH PROJECT**  
DEFENDING PUBLIC HEALTH SINCE 2012  
environmentalhealthproject.org

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Dear Members of the Congressional Energy and Environment Committee:

We at the [Environmental Health Project](#) (EHP) are writing to urge you to consider the health impacts of increased [shale gas development](#) (also known as unconventional gas development or fracking) on frontline communities.

EHP is a nonprofit organization that advocates for a health-protective approach to shale gas development. We work to ensure that residents' health and wellbeing are at the center of policy decisions related to energy development and that all members of society, regardless of race or ethnicity, sex, sexual identity, age, disability, or socioeconomic status, have access to clean air, water, and soil.

As you are aware, shale gas development has [rapidly expanded](#) in the United States in recent years, particularly in regions like the Appalachian Basin. While this expansion has rested on the touted benefits of increased energy production and economic growth in some areas, it has also raised serious concerns about the health impacts on those living closest to shale gas operations.

Studies have shown that shale gas development can have [significant health impacts](#), particularly on those living in proximity to drilling, fracking, and processing operations. Shale gas development involves the use of a range of chemicals, including acids, biocides, and surfactants, that can pose [serious health risks](#) to those living nearby. These chemicals can be released into the [air](#) and [water](#) during drilling, fracking, and processing operations, leading to respiratory problems like asthma, chronic bronchitis, and reduced lung function. In addition, exposure to these chemicals can cause skin and eye irritation, as well as other symptoms like headaches, dizziness, and nausea. Some of the chemicals used in shale gas development have also been linked to an increased risk of cancer, particularly in those who are exposed over a long period of time.

In addition to health impacts from air emissions, there are several other potential health impacts associated with shale gas development:

- [Mental health impacts](#): Shale gas development can lead to stress, anxiety, and depression in residents of affected communities. The disruption of daily life, loss of control over one's environment, and concerns about safety and health can all contribute to mental health problems.

- [Noise pollution](#): Shale gas operations can be very loud, with noise levels that exceed recommended limits. Exposure to high levels of noise can lead to hearing loss, tinnitus, and other health problems.
- [Light pollution](#): Shale gas operations often require bright lighting at night, which can disrupt sleep and circadian rhythms. Exposure to artificial light at night has been linked to increased risk of obesity, diabetes, and other health problems.
- [Water pollution](#): Shale gas development can lead to contamination of groundwater and surface water with chemicals used in the drilling and fracking process as well as the transportation and disposal of liquid sludge and solid waste. These can have serious health impacts, including increased risk of cancer and other diseases.
- [Climate change](#): Shale gas development contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, which contribute to climate change. Climate change has a wide range of health impacts, including increased risk of heat-related illness, respiratory problems from air pollution, and increased risk of vector-borne diseases like Lyme disease and West Nile virus.
- [Health of pregnant individuals](#):
  - Pregnant individuals living in proximity to shale gas development sites may be at higher risk of exposure to harmful pollutants, such as benzene and methane, which could result in adverse health effects.
  - The potential risks may include respiratory problems, neurological effects, and increased risk of preterm birth, low birth weight, and birth defects in fetuses.
- [Health of fetuses](#):
  - Exposure to toxic chemicals and gases associated with shale gas development, such as benzene and methane, has been linked to an increased risk of birth defects, low birth weight, and preterm birth in fetuses.
  - The potential risks may be further amplified by the effects of stress and anxiety associated with living in close proximity to shale gas development sites.

These health risks are particularly concerning for frontline communities, which may already be facing other environmental and social stressors that increase their vulnerability to health impacts. Therefore, it is important for policymakers to take [proactive measures](#) to reduce these risks and protect the health and well-being of impacted communities. Specifically, we urge you to:

1. Conduct a comprehensive health impact assessment on shale gas development in affected areas, particularly those with a high concentration of low-income, minority, and other vulnerable populations.

2. Increase funding for research into the health impacts of shale gas development, with a particular focus on understanding the cumulative impacts of exposure to multiple pollutants.
3. Establish stronger regulations to reduce emissions from shale gas operations, particularly those that have been shown to pose the greatest risk to public health.
4. Provide resources and support for communities affected by shale gas development, including access to health care, information, and technical assistance.
5. Engage with and listen to the concerns of frontline communities and ensure that they have a seat at the table in decision-making processes related to shale gas development.

We believe that these steps are necessary to protect the health and well-being of our communities, particularly those that are most vulnerable. We urge you to take action on this important issue and ensure that the health impacts of shale gas development are given the attention and consideration they deserve.

Further, we strongly urge members of Congress to visit Southwestern Pennsylvania and meet with the families who have been impacted by shale gas development. This region has been a hub for shale gas production, and [residents have experienced firsthand](#) the negative effects on their health, environment, and quality of life.

During such a visit, congressional members can hear directly from residents who have experienced health issues due to exposure to air, water, noise, and light pollution. Members can also witness the disruption of daily life caused by the constant presence of drilling and fracking operations, including heavy truck traffic and the degradation of roads and infrastructure. Additionally, members of Congress can see the impact on property values and the loss of land and natural resources that communities rely on for their livelihoods.

We believe that hearing directly from impacted families in Southwestern Pennsylvania will provide members of Congress with a clearer understanding of the importance of protecting the health, safety, and well-being of communities in the face of shale gas development. We hope that by taking the time to meet with these families, members of Congress will be better equipped to make informed decisions on policies that affect the future of shale gas development and its impact on local communities. Please reach out directly to us to schedule a tour.

Sincerely,



**Alison L. Steele**  
Executive Director  
Environmental Health Project