



PRESS RELEASE

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Contacts:

Lisa DePaoli, Communications Manager, [Center for Coalfield Justice](http://CenterforCoalfieldJustice.org), 724-229-3550, x5, lisa@centerforcoalfieldjustice.org

Ned Ketyer, M.D., F.A.A.P., President, [Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania](http://PhysiciansforSocialResponsibilityPennsylvania.org), 724-255-7440, ned@psrpa.org

Heaven Sensky, Organizing Director, The Center for Coalfield Justice, 724-229-3550 x2, heaven@coalfieldjustice.org

Scott Smith, Communications Manager, [Environmental Health Project](http://EnvironmentalHealthProject.org), 412-600-0738, ssmith@environmentalhealthproject.org

Community Meeting Updates Residents on PA Health & Environment Studies, Discusses Health Impacts of Shale Gas Development

Canonsburg, PA, October 5, 2022 — A public meeting in Canonsburg, PA, today offered residents an opportunity to learn more about a set of research studies titled the “[PA Health and Environment Studies](#)” now being conducted by the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Public Health. The studies are exploring potential health impacts of the shale gas industry on residents of Southwestern Pennsylvania, including potential connections between this heavy industry and a spike in childhood cancers in the region. The PA Health and Environment studies are ongoing, and results were not shared at this meeting.

Persons who formerly participated as members of the studies’ **External Advisory Board** and who provided feedback to the study architects discussed the studies at the Canonsburg meeting and helped to prepare the community to understand the scope and limitations of the results.

“We held this meeting to bring as much transparency as possible to our communities,” said **Heaven Sensky**, former External Advisory Board co-chair and organizing director of the Center for Coalfield Justice. “When our government and academic institutions fail to be accountable to our communities, together as neighbors we can get answers and protect our health.”

“We’re encouraging residents to visit the studies’ website and ask questions of the research team, so that everyone can best understand the results once they are published,” said **Erica Jackson**, former External Advisory Board member and manager of community outreach and support for FracTracker Alliance. “These studies would not exist if it weren’t for the work of impacted families organizing in their communities, and we want to make sure those voices aren’t lost now that the research is underway.”

Today’s event was held outdoors at the Canonsburg town park in order to better protect residents from possible COVID-19 exposure. It was also livestreamed so attendees could view the presentations virtually. The event was planned and executed by the [Center for Coalfield Justice](#), the [Environmental Health Project](#), [FracTracker Alliance](#), the [Mountain Watershed Association](#), and [Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania](#).

“Although this meeting is in Canonsburg, it is important to understand that the health impacts at the forefront of these studies are regionwide,” said **Stacey Magda**, community organizer for Mountain Watershed Association. “Having the opportunity to work with a coalition of organizations that support environmental and human equity issues is such a powerful resource to offer our communities. We are hopeful folks will gain the opportunity to understand these studies, express concerns and experiences, and work together to find a path forward to ensure the health and vitality of our entire region.”

Additionally, the **Environmental Health Project** and **Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania** presented information families can use to identify impacts and protect their health.

“There is no doubt that residents living in proximity to shale gas development face a host of potential health issues,” said **Makenzie White**, public health manager at the Environmental Health Project. “Studies show that shale gas operations raise the risk of respiratory illnesses like asthma, heart disease and heart attacks, birth defects and pre-term deliveries, mental health problems, and cancer. It’s essential that we give impacted residents the tools they need to make informed decisions about their family’s health.”

“Nobody should be surprised when children living near fracked gas wells, pipelines, compressor stations, gas processing facilities, and fracking waste landfills start getting sick,” said former External Advisory Board member and current president of Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania, **Dr. Ned Ketyer**. “Dozens of studies already show serious harm to people living nearby, and children appear to bear the highest burden.”

Representatives of the **Pennsylvania Department of Health** and the **University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health** had originally committed to being on hand to explain the study process and to take questions from community members. However, the agency and the school decided to pull out of the meeting. A separate statement on this matter from meeting organizers can be viewed [here](#). The Department of Health has set up an [online form](#) where residents can ask questions and provide feedback.

In 2019, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf's administration [allocated \\$3 million to the studies](#), taking action after months of impassioned pleas by the [families of childhood cancer patients](#) who live in the most heavily drilled region of the state. The studies have been underway for two years.

"The constant drumbeat from industry to deny, deny can no longer be tolerated," said **Lois Bower-Bjornson**, mother of four, who is also southwestern field organizer with Clean Air Council and the host of Frackland tours. "The game that the industry is playing comes at a cost for the children and families that live in the frack fields of Southwestern Pennsylvania. A recent study from Yale University found that children living near oil and gas have three times the risk of developing leukemia. I don't see anyone talking about how bad industry is for our children and communities. We rely on public institutions to help protect us, and now those institutions can be added to the list of the complacent."

The studies cover the entirety of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Region, including Allegheny County, Armstrong County, Beaver County, Butler County, Fayette County, Greene County, Washington County, and Westmoreland County.

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