

**November 16, 2022**

## **Environmental Health Project Statement on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27)**

### **Background**

From November 6 to November 18, 2022, heads of state, ministers, and negotiators, along with climate activists, mayors, civil society representatives, and CEOs are meeting in Egypt for the 27th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27). The meeting is being held to build solidarity among governing bodies, to forge concrete pathways to solving critical climate change issues, and to ensure that the most vulnerable countries and communities are represented and supported.

Each country is expected to recommit to meeting their obligations under the landmark Paris Agreement, a legally binding international treaty on climate change adopted by 196 parties at COP21 in Paris in 2015. The goals of the Paris Agreement are to reduce emissions, build resilience, decrease vulnerability to the adverse effects of climate change, and to uphold and promote regional and international cooperation. The Paris Agreement is intrinsically linked to the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—all of which impact public health.

UN Climate Change Executive Secretary Simon Stiell began his COP27 opening remarks by paraphrasing Nobel prize-winning Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz: "You can tell whether a person is clever by their answers. You can tell whether a person is wise by their questions."

### **EHP's Statement**

We at the Environmental Health Project encourage the delegates and representatives at COP27 to ask wise questions and continue to advance the need for public health to play a significant role in both global and local conversations. As world leaders gather to discuss the protection of our earth, we must not fail to ask questions about the multitude of ways our reliance on fossil fuels negatively impacts both our planet and our health. The United States, China, Argentina, Algeria, and Mexico lead the world, but are not alone, in shale gas development. This heavy extractive industry not only negatively impacts our planet, but it also endangers frontline communities around the world.

Shale gas development releases large amounts of methane, a dangerously potent greenhouse gas. With wells that can leak methane at a rate as high as 7.9 percent, shale gas may be worse for the climate than coal as a fuel source.

In addition to methane, shale gas development releases measurable levels of toxic compounds, such as benzene, arsenic, formaldehyde, lead, and mercury. Shale gas facilities also emit fine and ultrafine particulate matter any time fossil fuels are burned—as when operators flare off shale gas during well completion or when they release pipeline pressure at compressor stations. Further, the diesel truck traffic that makes shale gas drilling possible emits measurable particulates.

Studies have found that these toxic pollutants can raise the risk of residents experiencing short- and long-term health effects. The pollutants raise the risk of asthma and other respiratory illnesses, heart disease and heart attacks, birth defects and pre-term deliveries, mental health issues, and cancer, among other health impacts. Continued use of fossil fuels represents not only a risk to the climate, but a risk to public health as well.

We encourage the parties assembled at COP27 to incorporate the reduction of the public health and environmental impacts from shale gas development into actionable goals in a global conversation that begins here and continues into the foreseeable future.

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

### **About EHP**

The Environmental Health Project (EHP) defends public health in the face of shale gas development. We provide frontline communities with timely monitoring, interpretation, and guidance. We engage diverse stakeholders: health professionals, researchers, community organizers, public servants, and others. We do so because knowledge protects health.