



PRESS RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL AUGUST 15, 6 P.M.

Contacts:

Sarah Carballo, Communications Specialist, [FracTracker Alliance](https://www.fracktracker.org), 304-266-6531, carballo@fracktracker.org

Lisa DePaoli, Communications Manager, [Center for Coalfield Justice](https://www.centerforcoalfieldjustice.org), 724-229-3550 x3, lisa@centerforcoalfieldjustice.org

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

Stacey Magda, Managing Organizer, [Mountain Watershed Association](https://www.mtwatershed.com), 724-455-4200 x9, stacey@mtwatershed.com

Tammy Murphy, Advocacy Director, [Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania](https://www.physiciansforsocialresponsibility.org), 215-749-0960, tammy@psrpa.org

Heaven Sensky, Organizing Director, [Center for Coalfield Justice](https://www.centerforcoalfieldjustice.org), 724-229-3550 x1, heaven@coalfieldjustice.org

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

Community & Health Organizations Urge Better Protections for Residents Following Release of PA Health & Environment Studies Results

California, PA, August 15, 2023 — Today at 6 p.m., the Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) and the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health hosted a public meeting at Pennsylvania Western University – California to release the findings of the Pennsylvania Health and Environment Studies. The studies looked at the prevalence of rare childhood cancers, asthma, and low birth weights in proximity to shale gas development (fracking) in Southwestern Pennsylvania. No information on the results was released prior to the meeting. Organizations attending the event are calling for better health protections for residents living near shale gas infrastructure.

“Without having seen the University of Pittsburgh’s report or its full studies beforehand, we can’t comment in any depth on the information released today until we’ve had a chance to reasonably digest the results,” said **Dr. Ned Ketyer**, president of Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania. “What we can say is that we wouldn’t be surprised if these new studies reveal significant correlations between shale gas development and health issues. These results would reinforce the assumption that shale gas is unsafe, especially for vulnerable populations like children, the elderly, pregnant individuals, and those with existing health problems.”

In 2019, former 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 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.

“Epidemiological studies are the gold standard of environmental health research,” said **Alison L. Steele**, executive director of the Environmental Health Project. “In addition to these new studies, more than [two dozen other epidemiological studies](#) show a correlation between shale gas development and health impacts for residents living nearby. Hundreds of [other investigations](#) and first-hand accounts have shown that shale gas development correlates with poor health outcomes for people living in proximity to such infrastructure.”

Residents living near shale gas development experience a range of health impacts. These impacts include a higher risk of:

- Respiratory problems like asthma, chronic bronchitis, and reduced lung function
- Headaches, dizziness, skin rashes, and nausea
- Hospitalization from heart-related complications
- Cancers, particularly in those who are exposed over a long period of time
- Preterm births, low birth weights, and birth defects in fetuses
- Mental health issues from noise and light pollution and the associated stress of industry

“Approximately 1.5 million Pennsylvanians live within a half mile of oil and gas wells,” said **Erica Jackson**, manager of community outreach and support at FracTracker Alliance. “That number increases if you include those living near fracking waste treatment sites, making this a critical concern for communities across the state.”

“When there is a correlation between an industry’s practices and increased rates of morbidity and mortality, it is the duty of the government to protect the residents,” said **Tammy Murphy**, advocacy director for Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania.

During the administration of the University of Pittsburgh studies, while community members eagerly awaited the progress and results, neither the DOH nor the university held any community meetings, either in-person or virtually, to discuss the studies. In fact, while both the DOH and the university initially agreed to attend—and helped to plan—an October 5, 2022, public meeting in Canonsburg, PA, both parties pulled out of the meeting at the eleventh hour for unspecified reasons. This action prompted several members of the External Advisory Board to resign.

“To date, the Pennsylvania Department of Health and other government bodies have failed to respond in a meaningful way to the health harms associated with shale gas development,” said **Heaven Sensky**, organizing director for the Center for Coalfield Justice. “Regardless of the study results, the harm is already here, and we need to take action to protect our families, friends, and neighbors. Governor Shapiro and every member of the General Assembly must act to give DEP and DOH the power to make decisions based on the very real and devastating health impacts of the industries they permit.”

“A reasonable public health approach should be based on a rapid and transparent response,” said **Stacey Magda**, managing organizer for Mountain Watershed Association. “We already have all the proof we need to take action to prevent further health impacts. More studies will only delay the health protections residents need. Direct action to protect public health must begin today.”

Organizations engaged in protecting residents from further health harms have proposed the following proactive steps:

- Governments must hold industry accountable for leaking toxic pollution that harms residents and hastens climate change. Tighter regulations must be put in place around all oil and gas activities. Additionally, industry-reported data on pollution from oil and gas activities in our communities is inadequate. More consistent monitoring is needed.
- The Pennsylvania General Assembly must fully fund agencies like the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Department of Health (DOH) so that they can do their job of protecting Pennsylvania’s resources and the health of residents. The DEP must more vigorously enforce the current regulations in place.
- Governor Shapiro must call on the DOH and the DEP to work more closely and transparently with communities to provide residents with health-protective strategies to combat pollution and to ensure that the voices of residents, especially those experiencing environmental and health harms, are heard.
- To protect the health and safety of Pennsylvanians, the legislature and Governor Shapiro should enact the eight recommendations made in the [Grand Jury Report](#) investigating the state’s shale gas industry. Governor Shapiro released this report in 2020 when he was Pennsylvania’s Attorney General. Extending setback distances from homes, schools, childcare centers, and nursing homes would be a good place to start.
- The DOH and DEP must work together and with federal agencies to conduct comprehensive health impact assessments on shale gas development in affected areas, particularly those with a high concentration of low-income, minority, and other vulnerable populations.
- Health systems and first responders should be better prepared for accidents, leaks, explosions, and other health impacts caused by the shale gas industry.

Immediately following the above meeting, the Center for Coalfield Justice and MAD-FACTS hosted a debrief and healing space at the California United Methodist Church at 227 3rd Street, California, PA, to discuss the results and what was learned.

###