

**Public Comments on Controlling Air Pollution from the Oil and Gas Industry
Before the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
By the Southwest Pennsylvania Environmental Health Project
Tuesday, June 15, 2021**

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Good afternoon. My name is Alison L. Steele, and I am the executive director at the Southwest Pennsylvania Environmental Health Project, a data-driven public health organization headquartered in McMurray, Pennsylvania, just south of Pittsburgh. We are a skilled group of health care providers, scientists, community educators, and data analysts who have become national leaders in the comprehensive understanding of public health consequences of oil and gas development, including the effects of air quality on individuals' health.

I am commenting today to express my organization's unequivocal support for stronger rules to curb air pollution from the oil and gas industry, which jeopardizes the health of countless Americans.

As leading climate scientists have said, air pollution from the oil and gas industry is having a major impact on climate change. The industry releases unacceptable amounts of fugitive and vented methane, a greenhouse gas particularly notorious for warming the planet. The resulting natural disasters, heat waves, and vector-borne diseases increase mortality and morbidity, creating an escalating public health crisis.

While the impact of climate change is a major public health consideration, our organization is primarily concerned with localized health impacts. In addition to releasing methane, the oil and gas industry—through drilling, extraction, transport, processing, and burning—pollutes local airsheds with volatile organic compounds, particulate matter, endocrine disrupting chemicals, and diesel exhaust. As we have seen in the regions we serve, air pollution from oil and gas development, even at low levels, can trigger immediate, dangerous health impacts.

Peer-reviewed research shows that people exposed to air pollution have a greater risk of developing respiratory issues, like persistent coughs, asthma, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.¹ Those with existing health conditions may suffer worsening symptoms and are more likely to end up in the hospital.² Senior citizens and children are especially at risk of experiencing negative health outcomes when exposed to air pollution, and pregnant women may have a higher risk of delivering babies pre-term or with birth defects.³

Long-term exposure to air pollution can increase the risk of premature death.⁴ The Journal of the American Medical Association in 2017 found strong evidence of increased mortality from air pollution, with some risks occurring even at levels below the current air quality standard.⁵ Those living near sources of air pollution are also more likely to develop advanced symptoms from respiratory infections like COVID-19,⁶ especially if they reside in Environmental Justice communities.

Every day, my organization confronts the health effects that coincide with under-regulated air pollution. We talk to people who are scared for themselves, for their loved ones, and for their neighbors. The status quo is not good enough for them. They need relief, and they need it now. A stronger air pollution standard can give them peace of mind, and it can go a long way toward giving them back their health.

The EPA's air pollution rulemaking can help to reverse the current trend and give us a chance to change the course of history. A stronger standard can lower the risk of health complications, reduce pollution-related deaths, and offer hope to the frontline communities most heavily impacted. We urge the EPA to follow the science and set stronger standards for controlling air pollution from the oil and gas industry. Thank you.

¹ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Integrated Science Assessment for Ozone and Related Photochemical Oxidants, Fed. Reg. 85:76 (April 20, 2020) p. 21849

² Lin S, Liu X, Le LH, and Hwang S-A. Chronic exposure to ambient ozone and asthma hospital admissions among children. *Environ Health Perspect.* 2008; 116:1725-1730.

³ Salam MT, Millstein J, Li YF, Lurmann FW, Margolis HG, Gilliland FD. Birth outcomes and prenatal exposure to ozone, carbon monoxide, and particulate matter: Results from the Children's Health Study. *Environ Health Perspect.* 2005; 113: 1638-1644; Morello-Frosch R, Jesdale BM, Sadd JL, Pastor M. Ambient air pollution exposure and full-term birth weight in California. *Environ Health.* 2010; 9: 44.

⁴ Jerrett M, Burnett RT, et al. Long-term ozone exposure and mortality. *N Engl J Med.* 2009: 1085-1095.

⁵ Di Q, Dai L, Wang Y, et al. Association of Short-term Exposure to Air Pollution With Mortality in Older Adults. *JAMA.* 2017;318(24):2446–2456.

⁶ Olivieri, D and Scoditti, E. (2005). Impact of environmental factors on lung defences. *European Respiratory Review*, 14, 51-56.