

Public Statement Regarding Governor Wolf's Announcement Initiating Two Health Studies of Shale Gas Fracking in Southwestern Pennsylvania

Background:

Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf announced today (November 22, 2019) that his administration will spend \$3 million on two studies to explore the potential health impacts of the natural gas industry. One study will use existing research that linked natural gas activity to medical conditions like asthma and, applying the same methodology, try to replicate those earlier findings in the population in southwestern Pennsylvania. The other study will focus specifically on rare childhood cancers, including Ewing sarcoma, with researchers looking at whether these young cancer patients were exposed to fracking more often than a control population. Each study is projected to last three years. The state is seeking to partner with an academic research institution.

EHP Statement:

The Southwest Pennsylvania Environmental Health Project (EHP) welcomes Governor Wolf's intention to examine health problems – including asthma, birth defects, heart disease, and rare childhood cancers – in shale gas areas of southwestern Pennsylvania. The governor has listened to his constituents and has taken the first step in understanding the relationship between fracking and these debilitating, and sometimes lethal, health issues. We ask that the Pennsylvania Department of Health be transparent about who will perform the study and the methodology being used, so that affected individuals and public health experts can suggest other pathways to carcinogenic exposure, such as the fracking waste stream, ensuring the study is as comprehensive as possible.

In the meantime, during the three years these studies will likely consume, we ask the governor to take a precautionary approach to protecting the health of children and other residents of the region. We urge the governor to hold the shale gas industry accountable for health impacts by requiring adequate setback distances from residences and schools, by enacting rules that limit emissions of toxic pollutants, by making it possible for residents to collect damages for health issues, and by strengthening Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Health oversight.

Raina Rippel, Director
Southwest Pennsylvania Environmental Health Project