

# ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PROJECT

DEFENDING PUBLIC HEALTH SINCE 2012

## 2023 YEAR IN REVIEW



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Photo Courtesy of Bob Donnan



## Note from Executive Director Alison L. Steele

Since 2012, EHP's team has devoted itself to defending public health in the face of oil and gas development, becoming a national leader in the understanding of the health impacts of shale gas development, in particular.

In 2023, EHP began its second decade by continuing to address priority issues:

1. Limiting the expansion of oil and gas-fueled infrastructure while supporting a just transition to renewable energy.
2. Improving health-protective standards, transparency, and accountability that benefit residents faced with pollution from oil and gas operations.
3. Leveraging EHP's unique public health perspective to help cultivate more informed and effective stakeholders, including community leaders, policymakers, health care professionals, and partner organizations.

As we continued to execute our core mission, we also pivoted to address emerging issues and to respond to real-time health threats – of which there were plenty. This year, EHP provided health-protective guidance to frontline communities after the East Palestine train derailment, educated decisionmakers about the health risks posed by additional petrochemical development in the Ohio River Valley, shared real-time air quality analysis tools with frontline communities in Pennsylvania and New York, and offered factual information on shale gas and health through op-eds and podcasts in Colorado, New York, and Pennsylvania. In these efforts and many others, we recognize our role in providing a strong voice to advocate for data-based, equitable, public health protections.

The fossil fuel industry is often a nuanced, fraught, and quickly evolving landscape. Over the years, much of the public conversation has shifted from well pads and compressor stations to gas-fired power plants and landfills that accept fracking waste, and now petrochemical facilities and methane-based hydrogen production have entered the picture. If these technologies seem unrelated, just remember that more of the latter will require more of the former, putting people at increasing risk of health harms.

EHP remains committed to meeting the challenges on all key fronts by supporting a just, equitable transition away from fossil fuels and toward a safer, healthier future for all.

Thank you for supporting EHP in our fight to defend public health.



**Alison L. Steele**  
Executive Director

# Responding to the Need for Public Health Resources

## Train Derailment & Fire in East Palestine, OH

Approximately 50 Norfolk Southern freight train cars derailed and caught fire while traveling through East Palestine, Ohio, at about 9 p.m. on Friday, February 3. EHP supported community groups in the area by developing resources specific to the chemicals released, partnering with PA State Senator Katie Muth to bring awareness to the situation in an opinion piece, and providing expert panelists for webinars and community meetings.



## Pennsylvania Health & Environment Studies (Pitt Study)

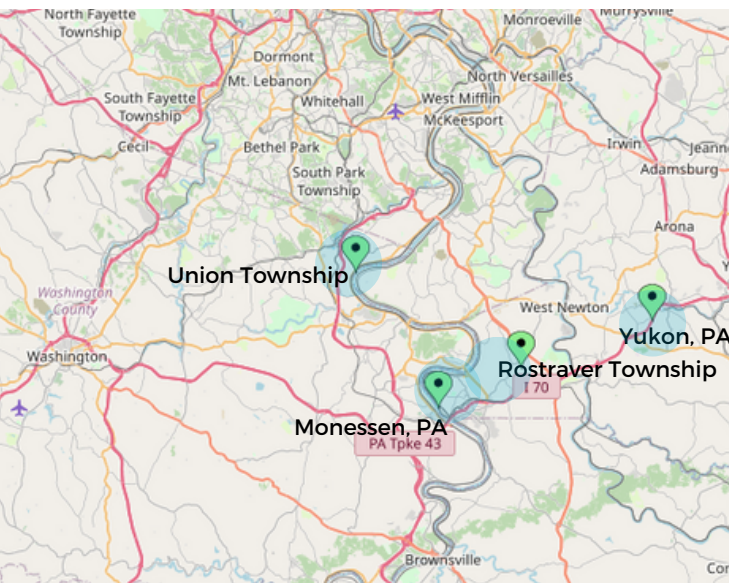
The Pennsylvania Health and Environment Studies, conducted by the University of Pittsburgh's School of Public Health, looked at the prevalence of rare childhood cancers, asthma, and low birth weights in proximity to shale gas development in Southwestern Pennsylvania. The study results found a strong link between proximity to unconventional shale gas development and asthma exacerbations, childhood cancer risk, and lower birth weight.

EHP's response to these studies is ongoing as we continue to bring our research based public health perspective to policymakers while advocating for legislative action to protect the health of Pennsylvanians.

# Program Update

## HealthWatch Communities

This year EHP completed monitoring with partner organizations in three communities in Southwestern Pennsylvania: Yukon, PA with Mountain Watershed Association, Rostraver Township and Monessen, PA with Protect PT, and Union Township with the Center for Coalfield Justice.



In these locations, our team worked to provide actionable air quality and health information to impacted frontline communities and developed guidance for communities and non profit organizations looking to conduct health impact assessments. This HealthWatch cohort represents the most in-depth monitoring EHP has done to date around facilities that accept shale gas waste.

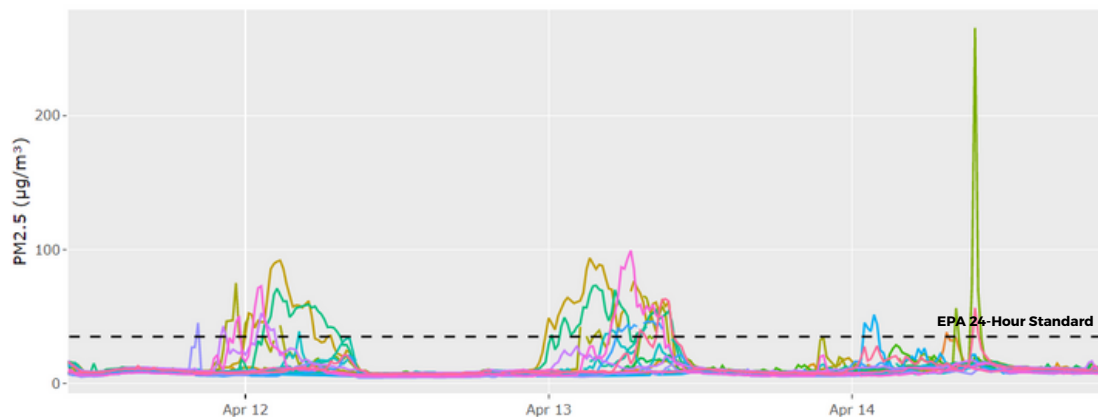
An evaluation of new monitoring technologies has been completed for the next cohort of HealthWatch communities that will launch next year.

# Program Update

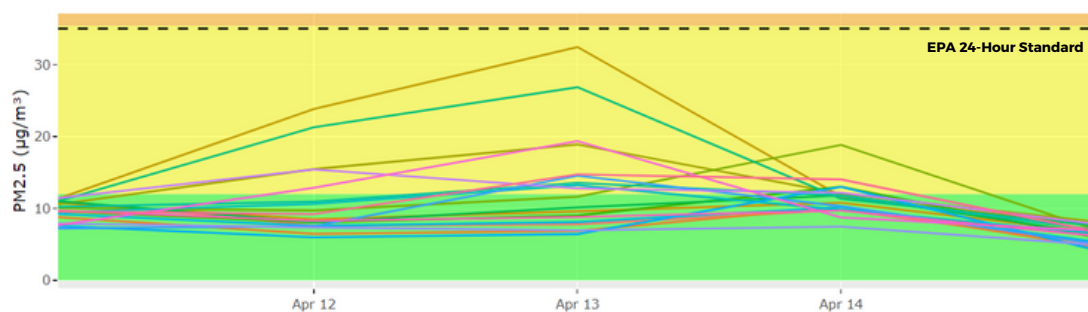
## AirView/Air Quality Monitoring

EHP has further advanced the AirView platform throughout 2023. Analysis from AirView provided evidence of the need for continuous air quality monitoring reported in short-term intervals in order to fully characterize the impact of oil and gas development on surrounding communities. One particularly stark example occurred around the Shell Ethane Cracker in Beaver County, PA, where particularly high short-term exposures failed to surpass the national ambient air quality standards.

15-Min Average Monitor Readings at Locations Near the Shell Ethane Cracker, Monaca, PA



24-Hour Average Monitor Readings at the Same Locations



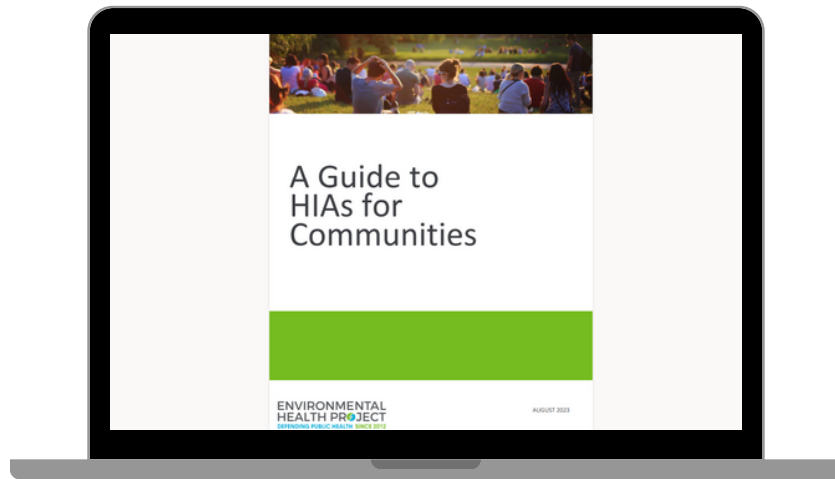
EHP has also worked to develop an interactive quality assurance console for partners who use AirView. This support tool has proved invaluable in the development of project documentation for four EPA air quality grants on which EHP partnered. This console allows quality assurance managers to review data quality issues flagged programmatically by our system and determine whether air quality data should be kept or discarded.

# Program Update

## Health Impact Assessments

In Summer 2023, EHP participated in the Environmental Health Fellowship Program made possible with the support of the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies. The program aimed to strengthen the region's capacity to address issues impacting the environment, health, equity, and sustainable outcomes by providing opportunities to bring high-quality environmental and public health students to the Greater Pittsburgh community.

EHP was proud to host Sarra Bridges, a University of Michigan student pursuing both a Master of Public Health in Environmental Health Sciences and a Master of Science in Environmental Justice. Sarra's project focused on health impact assessments (HIA), a valuable but underutilized tool in public health decision-making processes. Her goal was to understand the factors that have limited the use of HIAs in community advocacy work and identify opportunities to promote their use and effectiveness in the Greater Pittsburgh region.



Sarra delivered several key work products including a literature review of health impact assessment utilization to assess current trends and best practices, a critique of HIA processes at nonprofit organizations, and two resources guides to help communities and nonprofit groups understand HIAs as a tool and how they can best be used to support their constituents. These resource guides will be available on our website in early 2024. We greatly appreciated Sarra's work last summer and wish her all the best in her future endeavors!

# Communicating the Health Risks of Shale Gas Development

Communication is essential to make research studies, air emissions data, and shale gas industry jargon accessible for frontline residents so that they can make informed decisions about risks to their health. Likewise, healthcare providers and policymakers benefit from having shale gas health impacts centered in conversations about patient care and policy. By maintaining constant contact with core constituencies, EHP is raising awareness and defending public health.

**10** Public Statements/  
Comments to  
Government Agencies

**38** Media Quotes/TV &  
Radio Interviews/  
Podcasts/Mentions

**11** In-Depth  
Blog Posts

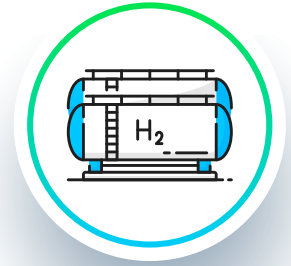
**6** Published  
Opinion  
Pieces



Educational programming is a mainstay of EHP's outreach to frontline communities, healthcare professionals, and policymakers.

## BLUE HYDROGEN

On January 25, 2023, EHP hosted a panel discussion moderated by Dr. Ned Ketyer titled, **Blue Hydrogen: What You Need to Know**. Experts offered a close look at blue hydrogen, its viability as an energy source, and the health risks of blue hydrogen hubs to residents living near these operations or the gas extraction sites on which they depend.



## PFAS

On March 21, 2023, EHP hosted a panel discussion, **PFAS: Breaking Down the Future of Forever Chemicals in Our Water**. The webinar explored how PFAS get into our water, including risks from shale gas development, testing, remediation, and policy options.

## INTERVIEW WITH KRISTINA MARUSIC, AUTHOR OF A NEW WAR ON CANCER

On October 12, 2023, EHP and partners hosted a conversation with Kristina Marusic about cancer and environmental health.



## AIR QUALITY MONITORING

On October 26, 2023, EHP and Grassroots Environmental Education hosted experts from the EPA Region 2 and NYS DEC for a special interactive program on air quality monitoring.

## PFAS IN PA WELLS

On October 26, 2023, EHP and partners hosted a webinar introducing PSR's new report on PFAS: "Forever Chemicals in Pennsylvania's Oil & Gas Production: A New Report from PSR and What it Means for Frontline Communities."



# Our New Pittsburgh Office

For much of the past three years, the COVID-19 pandemic forced EHP to close its long-time headquarters at Waterdam Plaza in McMurray, PA, while we transitioned to a primarily remote work environment. Despite the office closure, EHP staff continued to provide uninterrupted assistance to communities, health professionals, partners, and policymakers throughout Southwestern Pennsylvania and beyond.

With EHP's lease at Waterdam Plaza expiring and a hybrid work environment preferable among staff, this year we relocated our headquarters to OneValley at the Roundhouse in Pittsburgh's Hazelwood Green, a restored former brownfield site. This coworking space provides office amenities, meeting rooms, and a large gathering room for events.

While you no longer will be able to pop in and see us anytime you want at the office that served us well for many years, you can always get in touch with us by phone or email and request to meet either in person or virtually.



# Our Growing Team

*Welcome!*



**AARON MAKATURA**

Project Coordinator for Appalachia

**TALOR MUSIL, MSW**

Field Manager



**JACKSON ZEILER, MPH**

Public Health Analyst

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**DEFENDING PUBLIC HEALTH SINCE 2012**

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