ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PROJECT
DEFENDING PUBLIC HEALTH SINCE 2012
environmentalhealthproject.org

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Harrisburg Capitol Rotunda

Remarks by Alison L. Steele regarding the risk of rushing to support gas-fired data centers before sufficiently understanding the public health impacts

Good morning. My name is Alison Steele, executive director of the Environmental Health Project, a Pittsburgh-based, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization committed to defending public health from the risks of oil and gas development. At EHP, we believe that everyone has a right to clean air and pure water, no matter where they live.

My organization got its start because of residents who were getting sick near a new, booming technology. That technology promised economic benefits to the state. In turn, the state offered lax regulations and little oversight. The promise of revenue overshadowed caution around this new technology, and families living on the front lines describe paying for it with their health and sometimes their lives. Furthermore, they were tasked with fighting for their own protections—and often faced skepticism and sometimes hostility in the process.

That technology was unconventional gas development, commonly known as fracking. And it's relevant to why we're here today because we are now looking at a new possible technology boom: data centers. We know that massive data centers built in Pennsylvania will largely be powered by fracked gas. What's happening now echoes what we saw more than ten years ago: as policy was constructed to attract the gas industry to Pennsylvania, concerns about potential health and environmental impacts were overlooked.

But today we know what the health impacts look like. After more than a decade of research and dozens of peer-reviewed epidemiological studies, we know that people who live, work, and play near shale gas infrastructure are at greater risk for asthma and respiratory disease, heart attacks, headaches, fatigue, anxiety, depression, cancers, and birth impacts (including low birth weight, developmental disabilities, and congenital heart defects). Hundreds more independent investigations and personal accounts from residents corroborate those findings. We know that vulnerable populations (children, the elderly, people who are pregnant, and those with chronic health conditions) are at higher risk.

Fracked gas is largely methane, but it can also contain hazardous substances, including volatile organic compounds, particulate matter, and radioactive elements that can leak from any equipment along the supply chain—from where the gas is extracted (at well pads), through pipelines and compressor stations, to where it is burned at power plants. Toxic waste from the process can pollute water and escape from landfills. Further afield, the continued widespread use of fossil fuels contributes to the increasing severity of storms and wildfires, property damage and displacement, heat-related illnesses, and insect-borne diseases.

We know that more gas-powered hyperscale data centers mean more gas demand, and that more gas extraction means more health risks to people near and far. A recent Artificial Intelligence Energy Conference just south of Pittsburgh estimated a need for 1,800 new fracking wells to support the new data centers planned in southwestern Pennsylvania alone—plus the additional pipelines, compressor stations, and other infrastructure required to support that increase in demand.

Pennsylvania does not have to repeat the same mistakes as before. We know better, so we can do better for the residents of our commonwealth. Our leaders *must* acknowledge the health risks associated with hyperscale gas-fired data centers and their related supply chains. The sooner they do that, the better they can protect Pennsylvanians from a repeat of history.

Thank you.

Alison L. Steele, Executive Director
Environmental Health Project

About the Environmental Health Project
The Environmental Health Project (EHP) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit public health organization that defends public health in the face of shale gas development. EHP provides frontline communities with timely monitoring, interpretation, and guidance while engaging diverse stakeholders: health professionals, researchers, community organizers, policy makers, and others.