

Public Statement on PSR Report on PFAS Used in Shale Gas Development

July 13, 2021

Background:

Yesterday, Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) released *Fracking with “Forever Chemicals,”* a report presenting previously unpublicized evidence that major oil and gas companies, including ExxonMobil and Chevron, have used per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), or substances that could degrade into PFAS, in hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) for oil and gas in more than 1,200 wells in six U.S. states (Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Wyoming).

Toxic in minuscule concentrations, these industrial chemicals accumulate inside the human body and do not break down in the environment—hence their nickname, “forever chemicals.” The U.S. EPA has linked various PFAS to low infant birth weights, effects on the immune system, cancer, and hormone disruption.

EHP’s Environmental Data Scientist Nathan Deron and Medical Outreach Coordinator Debbie Larson, as well as Toxicologist and EHP Co-founder David Brown, contributed to the PSR report.

The PSR report can be viewed [here](#).

Statement from the Environmental Health Project:

The science on PFAS is clear. Even small levels of these extremely toxic compounds can have significant health impacts for people exposed to them. The vulnerable—children, the elderly, women who are pregnant, and those with existing health concerns—are at higher risk of health impacts from being exposed to PFAS.

People living near oil and gas activity can be exposed to PFAS by breathing polluted air or drinking contaminated water emitted from a well or other facility. Local residents may also come into contact with chemicals while they are being transported or when wastewater leaks, spills, or is purposely spread on roads as a dust-control measure. Because PFAS do not break down in the body, they may accumulate over long periods of time, potentially resulting in impacts on reproduction and infant birth rates; problems in the liver, thyroid, or kidneys; effects on the immune system and development; increased cholesterol levels; and cancer.

In the states in which the PSR report found PFAS, oil and gas operators are required to disclose the chemicals they use. Since shale gas operators do not need to disclose the chemicals they use in other states, and since the same companies cited in the report operate in other states, we can assume that the use

of PFAS may range more widely than reported. In Pennsylvania, for example, while operators need to report chemicals used in the hydraulic fracturing process to a national registry, they do not need to publicly disclose chemicals used in the drilling process and may exclude registering any compound they deem a trade secret.

To protect public health, shale gas operators should be required to publicly disclose every chemical they use in both the drilling and hydraulic fracturing processes. Operators and governmental agencies should be made to monitor emissions wherever pathways to exposure are present. Just as important, operators and agencies should track all waste streams to ensure that no such chemicals are leaking into the environment and reaching airsheds or drinking water supplies.

The PSR report that PFAS are being used by oil and gas companies is further evidence of the health risks associated with fossil fuel extraction. The burden of protecting the public's health from industry should not fall on those who are impacted. It is the responsibility of the state departments of health and environmental protection to step in and do the jobs they are called on to do.

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