FROM: Alison L. Steele  
TO: Health Care Providers and Others Signing On to PA DOH Letter  
SUBJECT: Response to Public Health Sign-on Letter from PA DOH

Dear Health Care Provider,

Last year, you signed on to a letter addressed to Governor Wolf and Dr. Rachel Levine, Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH), titled “Call to Action from Pennsylvania Health Care Providers to Better Protect Pennsylvanians from Health Effects of Shale Gas Development.” The SWPA Environmental Health Project (EHP) originated the letter, which was signed by 55 health care providers and a dozen other citizens and sent to the DOH by Dr. Ned Ketyer on August 20, 2020. We thank you again for your willingness to sign on to it.

We have now received a response to the letter from Dr. Levine, which you can read here. EHP appreciates that the DOH “is open to working with legislators and stakeholders in addressing Oil and Natural Gas Production (ONGP) from a public health perspective.” We are also gratified that the DOH now recognizes that “some recent studies have found adverse health impacts associated with ONGP (particularly in relation to birth outcomes and respiratory effects).”

However, we continue to disagree with the DOH that “at this time there is still an insufficient number of studies with strong scientific methods to provide sufficient evidence to determine the overall health effects.” The DOH has maintained that a literature review of the epidemiological research on the health effects of unconventional ONGP, done in conjunction with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (“the Bamber review”), shows inconclusive evidence of health effects from shale gas development. EHP has long contended that the Bamber review is problematic in its approach and flawed in its conclusions. Our rationale is outlined in a letter EHP sent to Dr. Levine in August 2019.

In addition to its own observations, EHP cites more than two dozen peer-reviewed epidemiological studies that now show a correlation between adverse health outcomes and shale gas development. Many other studies and investigations are outlined in the Compendium of Scientific, Medical, and Media Findings Demonstrating Risks and Harms of Fracking (Seventh Edition, December 14, 2020).
While the DOH response shows some progress in the agency’s recognition of the
dangerous effects of shale gas development, we continue to urge the DOH to take a
more health-protective approach to this vital public health concern. The letter you
signed has helped to move the needle in the right direction, and we are truly grateful
for your willingness to speak up and be heard.

Sincerely,

Alison L. Steele
Executive Director
Southwest Pennsylvania Environmental Health Project