

Press Release

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Pennsylvania Health Care Providers Call on Gov. Wolf, PA DOH to Better Protect Pennsylvanians from Health Effects of Shale Gas Development

McMURRAY, PA, August 21, 2020 – Pennsylvania health care providers are calling on Governor Tom Wolf and the Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) to better protect Pennsylvanians from the harmful health effects of shale gas development. The 55 health care providers signing on to [a letter to Gov. Wolf and DOH Secretary Rachel Levine](#) are comprised of doctors, nurses, social workers, and other health care providers across Pennsylvania.

Specifically, the signers are calling on Gov. Wolf and the DOH to:

1. Take a precautionary approach to shale gas development (fracking).
2. Hold the shale gas industry fully accountable for emitting pollutants into the environment by introducing better regulations and enforcing commensurate penalties for violations.
3. Inform and educate the public about measures Pennsylvania residents can take to best protect themselves and their families from harm linked to shale gas emissions and waste streams while studies are undertaken that clarify the relationship between fracking and public health.

The letter notes that unhealthy levels of toxics – including hazardous air pollutants (HAPs), volatile organic compounds (VOCs), fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), and silica dust – are routinely released into the airshed at every stage of shale gas development. Combined with sunlight, these releases also lead to elevated ground level ozone (smog). Associated methane leaks heat the planet, leading to climate disasters that affect the lives and livelihoods of millions.

“More than two dozen studies have shown a correlation between shale gas development and a host of health issues, including respiratory problems, cardio-pulmonary issues, fatigue and nausea, poor birth outcomes, neurological issues such as memory impairment, and depression,” said Ruth McDermott Levy, director of Global & Public Health at Villanova University's College of Nursing. “There may also be a link

between the shale gas industry and the higher than normal incidence of childhood cancers, primarily Ewing sarcoma, being reported across Southwestern Pennsylvania.”

Governor Wolf has committed more than \$3 million to studying both the high incidences of childhood cancer and the health effects of fracking generally in southwestern Pennsylvania. But it will take upwards of three years for these as-yet-undefined studies to be completed. Meanwhile, residents of the region continue to suffer the effects of an industry that has not yet proven it is safe for public health, the letter notes.

Dr. Ned Ketyer, a southwestern Pennsylvania pediatrician and a signer of the letter, and also a consultant for the SWPA Environmental Health Project, said, “The Pennsylvania Department of Health has so far failed in its duty to adequately study the public health effects of shale gas development and has underperformed in its duty to protect the public from such health effects through research, education, and information and through mobilizing the state’s medical community.”

The letter was sent to Governor Wolf and Secretary Levine via email on August 20, 2020. In addition to the 55 Pennsylvania health care providers who signed the letter, a handful of health care providers from other states, as well as some private citizens, also signed on.

The letter can be accessed here:

<https://www.environmentalhealthproject.org/sites/default/files/assets/press/letter-to-governor-wolf-and-secretary-levine-from-pa-health-care-providers.pdf>

About SWPA Environmental Health Project

The [SWPA Environmental Health Project](#) (EHP) is a nonprofit public health organization that defends public health in the face of oil and gas development. We provide frontline communities with timely monitoring, interpretation and guidance. We engage diverse stakeholders: health professionals, researchers, community organizers, public servants, and others. We do so because knowledge protects health.