



October 27, 2023

Chair Vitali and members of the House Environmental Resource and Energy Committee,

Clean Water Action is a national non-profit environmental organization with roughly 80,000 members across Pennsylvania. Since our founding during the campaign to pass the landmark Clean Water Act in 1972, we've worked to win strong health and environmental protections by bringing issue expertise, solution-oriented thinking and people power to the table.

On behalf of our roughly 80,000 statewide members, we'd like to offer our support for pursuing increased setbacks for occupied structures from fracking infrastructure and operations. We believe that HB 170 is an effective vehicle for achieving these improved protections.

At its core, this is a health and safety issue. The oil and natural gas industry includes a wide range of operations and equipment, from wells to natural gas gathering lines and processing facilities, to storage tanks, and transmission and distribution pipelines which can be sources of significant emissions.

The industry emits methane, a potent greenhouse gas with a global warming potential more than 25 times that of carbon dioxide. It also emits volatile organic compounds (VOCs), a group of chemicals that contribute to the formation of ground-level ozone (smog). In addition to helping form ozone, VOC emissions from the oil and gas industry include air toxics such as benzene, ethylbenzene, and n-hexane.

The results of a recent University of Pittsburgh study found that children living within 1 mile of a gas well had a chance of developing lymphoma five to seven times greater than others residing further away. Other data from the study linked the exacerbation of asthma to the production phase of development and concluded that those living near wells had an increased risk of experiencing an asthma attack. This followed a 2022 paper by the Yale School of Public Health that showed children living near Pennsylvania wells that use fracking are two to three times more likely to contract a form of childhood leukemia and a Harvard study in January of that same year that found elderly people living near or downwind from gas pads have a higher risk of premature death than seniors who don't live in that proximity. While a 2020 study by researchers at Drexel and John Hopkins found significantly increased odds of hospitalization among heart failure subjects in relation to increased fracking activity in the area near them.

These known-associated hazards fail to acknowledge the catastrophic incidents that can and have taken place. In 2011, a Pennsylvania gas well operated by Chesapeake Energy erupted, sending thousands of gallons of chemical-laced and highly saline water spilling from the drill site and forcing nearby families to temporarily evacuate their homes. In 2014, three gas wells exploded at Chevron's gas well site in Green County sparking a fire that burned for four days and leading to a half-mile radius safety perimeter being established around the site. More recently, an explosion occurred earlier this year at Energy Transfer's natural gas processing plant in Washington County when a defective valve released a vapor cloud of natural gas liquids and it ignited. The fire burned for most of the day, venting gases and flames.

Other states have already acknowledged the safety risks as well as the adverse health outcomes and have taken steps to better protect their residents. In 2021, Colorado adopted 2000-foot setbacks from homes

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and schools. While early this year a setback bill in California was implemented that largely prohibits regulators from approving applications to drill new wells and rework existing wells within 3,200 feet of "sensitive" areas such as schools, parks and homes.

Similar efforts have also been publicly supported in Pennsylvania by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, the 43rd Statewide Investigating Grand Jury and Governor Shapiro during his time as Pennsylvania Attorney General.

The mounting evidence is clear and cannot and should not be ignored. The current setbacks under Section 3215 of Title 58 (Oil and Gas) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes do not provide adequate protection for the environment or for public health and safety and, therefore, need to be increased. That's why we hope you'll join us in supporting and moving HB 170.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Hvozdoch", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Steven Hvozdoch
Pennsylvania Campaigns Director

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