



**Testimony on the “Leachate Loophole” in Pennsylvania**

**Hearing of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee**

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Thank you for the opportunity to offer written testimony for the Committee on legislation regarding the prevalence of leachate.

The mission of the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PA DOH) is to promote healthy behaviors, prevent injury and disease, and to assure the safe delivery of quality health care for all people in Pennsylvania. Part of that mission is accomplished by our Bureau of Epidemiology's Division of Environmental Health Epidemiology. This division examines how different environments affect communities' well-being. The health effects of breathing contaminated air or drinking contaminated water, living near abandoned toxic waste sites or being exposed to substances, such as lead, arsenic, pesticides and heavy metals, are all potentially cause for concern in Pennsylvania, a historically industrial state. As a result, this division works to promote and enhance the health and well-being of the public and the environment through evaluation of any potential exposures of concern relating to environmental chemicals as well as assessing the potential harmful effects on human health posed by those exposures.

Currently, this division exists to be responsive to environmental health concerns raised by Pennsylvanians. The division regularly partners with sister agencies within the administration, as well as federal and local partners to perform investigations and reviews of environmental health issues. As part of this work, the department maintains an Oil and Natural Gas Production Health Concerns Registry to allow citizens an opportunity to report environmental health complaints specifically related to oil and natural gas drilling or production-related activities to the department for follow up. This registry has been in existence since 2011; however, the department has worked over the last several years to improve the registry. The department has standardized the questionnaire and interview process, increased the number of questions asked and provided a quarterly summary of findings that is posted on the department's website. The data posted present information on the age, gender, and region or county of the complainant as well as the health effects experienced by the complainant or complainant's family and friends as reported by the complainant.

The department urges any Pennsylvanian concerned with potential environmental health impacts related to oil and gas development operations to contact registry staff at 717-787-3350 to make a complaint. The registry is an important conduit that allows the department to be responsive to the needs of residents. Pennsylvanians should know that the department stands ready to receive and respond to these concerns.

Further, PA DOH serves in a supporting role to address any environmental impacts related to leachate to the Department of Environmental Protection. While PA DOH reviewed proposed legislation which would address the treatment and processing of leachate as it relates to natural gas production or in waste disposal locations, we would note that the Department of Environmental Protection has the primary purview over these areas. Specifically, PA DOH can speak from a purely public health perspective, noting that the practical applicability of this legislation would be best addressed by the Department of Environmental Protection.

We are aware that certain contaminants, radioactive materials, and other additives are components of the wastewater produced during the natural gas fracturing process. Some of those additives could pose a risk to humans depending on the prevalence and level of exposure. Further, the Department is not aware of the full spectrum of the additives contained in oil and gas wastewater and as a result may not be able to assess the level of risk posed by its release into the general environment.

Given these circumstances, from a purely public health standpoint, PA DOH believes that measures to prevent or reduce human contact with potential contaminants is beneficial. We understand that there may be practical considerations in testing and treating waste of this type that are beyond our scope and better addressed by DEP. Nevertheless, efforts to reduce some of the potential for exposure where risk exists would be helpful.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on this issue.