

PENNSYLVANIA'S SHALE GAS BOOM:

How Policy Decisions Failed to Protect Public Health and What We Can Do to Correct It



Over a decade of government decisions during Pennsylvania's shale gas boom have indicated the following trends:

- 1.** A chasm exists between the reliable public health research that has been conducted and the policies or initiatives that Pennsylvania's leading public health agency and other government policymakers have promoted. Public health actions are meant to be based on strong evidence, not irrefutable evidence. Yet, policymakers have consistently justified inaction by citing a lack of sufficient knowledge about health impacts.
- 2.** Regulations provide a degree of safety, but there is a common misconception that they are data-based, health-protective standards; they are not. The widespread presumption of safety means that the burden of proof that emissions are causing harm often falls to the affected individuals and communities.
- 3.** With respect to shale gas development in Pennsylvania, the promise of economic benefits overshadowed the caution over health impacts. In an attempt to attract more economic benefits, policies were created to be exceptionally accommodating to the industry.

Four key areas represent opportunities for Pennsylvania to take a more health-protective approach to shale gas development:

Equity

- Protect people in areas that bear the burden of all aspects of shale gas development
- Create more meaningful approaches to ensuring equity

Transparency

- Allow individuals, community groups, and other organizations access to important health information that they can understand and act on
- Compel the industry to make public all chemicals it uses

Authority

- Provide funding for government agencies to do their jobs effectively
- Authorize these agencies to take action through a strong mandate to protect public health

Accountability

- Strengthen health assessment programs at the state level to be more responsive to residents' needs
- Follow up on reports of adverse health outcomes and risk near shale gas sites

We call on Pennsylvania's leaders to introduce policy and support decisions that protect the public's health in the face of this emission-intensive extractive industry. There is much to be done.

Read the full white paper here: www.environmentalhealthproject.org/white-paper

**ENVIRONMENTAL
HEALTH PROJECT**
DEFENDING PUBLIC HEALTH 2012-2022

APRIL 2022

