

For Immediate Release

Contact: Adam Garber, PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center, (267) 515-1220
Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper, (215) 369-1188 ext. 102
Karen Feridun, Berks Gas Truth, (610) 678-7226
Sam Bernhardt, Food and Water Watch, (516) 680-0760
Iris Marie Bloom, (215) 840-6489

100,000 Signatures for a Moratorium on Fracking Delivered to Gov. Tom Corbett

[Harrisburg, Pa.] – With public concern about serious harms caused by the gas drilling process known as fracking continuing to rise, PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center and a coalition of public health, community and environmental groups delivered more than 100,000 petitions to the state Legislature and Gov. Tom Corbett today. The petition calls for a moratorium on gas drilling in Pennsylvania until our environment and public health can be protected.

This is believed to be the largest public outcry on fracking in state history.

“The voices of concerned Pennsylvanians have spoken loud and clear today: If this track record of pollution, destruction and environmental violations is what we’re seeing in fracking’s ‘infancy’ stage, the people of Pennsylvania don’t want to see maturity,” said Adam Garber, PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center’s field director. “The public response has been overwhelming as Pennsylvanians from all walks of life signed the petition: Democrats, Republicans and Independents; residents from our cities, suburbs and rural Pennsylvania; and from every corner and county of the commonwealth.”

After a news event highlighted the numerous dangers from fracking, 20 Pennsylvanians, each carrying a box filled with the names of other concerned citizens, marched over to Gov. Corbett’s office to deliver the 100,000 signatures.

Despite growing public concern over fracking, the gas drilling industry has used their political muscle in recent years to stop any new environmental protections from passing. Just last year, their army of lobbyists and PR firms—combined with millions of dollars in campaign contributions—were even able to remove communities’ ability to establish local protections from gas drilling.

“As nurses, our focus is on preventing illness by reducing hazards and advocating for healthy environments,” said Nina Kaktins, Co-Chair of the Pennsylvania State Nurses Association Environmental Health Committee. “A number of illnesses have been reported in areas where fracking occurs, including nosebleeds, headaches, skin irritation, fatigue, stomach pains, difficulty breathing, and more. While research projects are underway to investigate the health effects of fracking, a moratorium is a common-sense measure to prevent further illness.”

"My life has been devastated by working in the gas fields. Without proper training, tools or protection, I was routinely sent out to handle toxic fracking fluid in unsafe ways," said Rick "Mac" Sawyer. "Now, a year later, I'm sick, with no health insurance. The gas companies don't care about the health and safety of their employees, or any Pennsylvanians for that matter."

The rush to drill has had devastating effects on Pennsylvania's environment and public health, and includes a track record of thousands of violations of cornerstone environmental laws and protections. In fact, the gas drilling industries have committed over 4,363 environmental violations in recent years.

There have also been dozens of cases where people's health has suffered. In Dimock, Pa., drilling operations contaminated the drinking water wells of several households for roughly three years, perhaps more. And, recently released court documents show that gas drillers settled with a Washington County family who endured health problems.

"We hold the future of civilization in our hands now," said Rev. Thwing, Pastor of St. Paul's United Church. "The decisions we make now are critical. We demand a moratorium on fracking until we are absolutely sure that our water will be safe and the methane leaks are reduced to levels that will minimize climate change."

"With 18 new pipelines planned to crisscross Pennsylvania this year, we will all soon live in the drilling region," said Karen Feridun, founder of Berks Gas Truth. "These pipelines, with air polluting compressor stations every 40-100 miles, will bring the same risks that wells bring to communities in the Marcellus region and they're just as poorly regulated. We are not willing to forsake any part of this state for fracking."

Sen. Jim Ferlo (Allegheny) joined the organizations at their rally, pledging to respond to this call from action in the coming days.

"I am proud to introduce legislation in the coming days which will halt fracking in order to do thorough and accurate study of its environmental effects. I ask my colleagues in the General Assembly to take heed of the request of these 100,000 petition signers, and I ask citizens to continue their tireless advocacy on behalf of the Commonwealth's environment," said Senator Ferlo (Allegheny).

"After years of poisoned drinking water, toxic spills and air pollution, Pennsylvanians are increasingly becoming fed up with fracking. They're organizing street by street and town by town - at churches, at colleges and at coffee shops," said Sam Bernhardt, Food & Water Watch's Pennsylvania organizer. "Across the state, local officials have been feeling the heat from residents, and now our leaders in Harrisburg are feeling the heat as well. Pennsylvanians are sick of fracking."

Farmers, religious leaders, impacted community members and others spoke passionately about the threats posed by gas drilling and the need for a moratorium.

"Drillers are dumping radioactive drill cuttings and toxic fracking flowback all over the state, starting up operation of compressor stations despite explosions, fires, and health. With impacts this extreme, it's time to admit the fracking experiment has failed and call a halt before more people get hurt," said Iris Marie Bloom, Director of Protecting Our Waters.

"Our DFA Pennsylvania groups is extremely concerned about the dangerous impacts fracking has on human health and the environment. Our members are willing and ready to demand Governor Corbett and legislators to protect Pennsylvanians from fracking," said Ljubica Sarafov, Mid-Atlantic Field Organizer for Democracy for America.

"We don't need fracked gas to power our economy, and our planet can't afford any more wasted time perusing these kind of bridge fuels to nowhere," said Jesse Bacon, an organizer for Environmental Action. "It's time for leaders in Harrisburg to end this dangerous and unnecessary drilling practice."

"Communities are being subjected to water and air pollution from drilling and gas infrastructure and our forests and rivers are bearing the brunt of the state allowing the industry to do what they want. We must stop this assault now before the next wave of permits ruins the state," said Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper.

The event's organizers pledged that the fight doesn't end with this petition delivery, as the groups plan to continue highlighting the dangers of fracking, organize communities to call for a moratorium, and call on decision-makers to start listening to the public on this issue instead of the industry's lobbyists in Harrisburg.

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