



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF PENNSYLVANIA

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The League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania
Public Comment to the
Citizens Advisory Committee of the Department of Environmental Protection
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
May 20, 2015

I am Susan Carty speaking on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania. We thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment on two critical issues before you today: The Case for an Unconventional Natural Gas Development Health Registry and the feedback of the Review Committee on the Act 54 Report.

As you may be aware, the League has completed studies on natural gas extraction, has developed positions based on statewide consensus, and continues to update our resources on this issue. Our 2010 position¹ supports

- the monitoring and protection of public health and
- research on the effects of natural gas development on the economy, environment and public health.

The Governor's Marcellus Shale Commission recommended that the Department of Health play an important role in collecting and evaluating clinical data provided by health care data and work with medical institutions to establish a population-based health registry.² However, the \$2 million dollar budget to fund this initiative was cut prior to

¹ Found at http://www.palwv.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/221_MarcellusShalePositionInDetail.pdf

² See the following sections found on p. 105 of the document available at <http://www.marcellus.psu.edu/resources/PDFs/MSACFinalReport.pdf>

9.2.37 The Department of Health should work in partnership with the Commonwealth's graduate schools of public health and other appropriate medical institutions to better protect and enhance the public health interests of citizens, such as through the establishment of the population-based health registry and curriculum development.

9.2.38 The Department of Health should collect and evaluate clinical data provided by health care providers.

9.2.39 The Department of Health should routinely evaluate and assess Marcellus Shale-related environmental data, such as air, water, solid waste, and fish and other food samples, that is collected from a variety of entities, such as PA DEP, US EPA, the US Geologic Survey, water works or treatment facilities, industry and academic partners.

9.2.40 The Department of Health should create, or oversee the creation of, a population-based health registry with the purpose of characterizing and following over time individuals who live in close proximity (ie one mile radius) to gas drilling and production sites. 9.2.41 The Department of Health

legislation being considered for a vote. The Citizens Marcellus Shale Commission also included numerous specific recommendations for better protecting public health and for monitoring the occupational health of shale gas workers.³ The League's 2013 Resource Guide *Shale Gas and Public Health* underscores the need:

*While the clinicians' primary job is to treat the sick, the accumulated knowledge of physicians does have a place in public health research. However, without an organized effort to gather and interpret the evidence collected from individual cases, this information can be lost.*⁴

In our advocacy for a health registry, the League applauds the work of the Geisinger Hospital System for mining data to examine changes in health potentially impacted by drilling in the northern tier. Most importantly, we commend the efforts of the Southwest Pennsylvania Environmental Health Project (SWPA-EHP), a private non-profit environmental health organization. Since beginning operations in Washington County in February 2012, this agency has provided advice and referrals to residents in this heavily drilled county. Further, the project serves as a resource center for physicians and researchers. Their work underscores the significant concerns that many Pennsylvanians share about the impact of natural gas operations on public health. As a state-wide organization, the League would advocate not only for a registry for areas in close proximity to drilling sites, but also those located near compressor stations, processing plants, and storage facilities that are growing increasingly prevalent throughout the Commonwealth. As we look to the long-awaited revisions of Chapter 78, we need health data to determine if safeguards implemented are, in fact, adequate. We look forward to Ms. Rippel's presentation.

The Act 54 Report, a topic of numerous CAC meetings, reinforces the need for revised regulations for long-wall mining. We are optimistic that those who are a part of the review committee will provide specific recommendations and timelines for implementing significant changes. The dewatering of valued streams, beyond all efforts of restoration, is too high a price to pay for coal extractions processes that could be modified to prevent such degradation in the future. We can no longer wait and see. Now is the time for the Department to act decisively to protect our right to clean water.

Finally, as you contemplate regulations, the League urges each of you to lend your voices to the need for clarity to prevent definitions and provisions that are misleading to the public. A case in point is the 'freshwater' impoundment pits under the final rulemaking for the Chapter 78

should establish a system to provide for the timely and thorough investigation of and response to concerns and complaints raised by citizens, health care providers or public officials.

9.2.41 The Department of Health should establish a system to provide for the timely and thorough investigation of and response to concerns and complaints raised by citizens, health care providers or public officials.

9.2.42 The Department of Health should educate health care providers on the presentation and assessment of human illness that may be caused by material in drilling constituents.

9.2.43 The Department of Health should establish public education programs regarding the constituents used in the drilling process, 9.2.41 The Department of Health should establish a system to provide for the timely and thorough investigation of and response to concerns and complaints raised by citizens, health care providers or public officials, potential pathways to humans, and at what level, if any, they have the potential to cause human illness.

³ See p. 10 <http://pennbpc.org/sites/pennbpc.org/files/CMSC-Final-Report.pdf>

⁴ See p. 5 <http://shale.palwv.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/846114-League-of-Women-Voters-Shale-Resource-Guide.pdf>

provisions. Under the existing document, freshwater pits can hold mine-influenced water - a serious pollutant.

We thank you for your on-going consideration as you strive to encourage the Department to protect our environment and public health.