

Governor Josh Shapiro and the Fossil Fuel Industry: Abandoning Climate Science for Industry Support

As Pennsylvania's Attorney General, Josh Shapiro championed clean air and water. He promoted a 2020 Grand Jury [report](#) that found the state's Department of Environmental Protection failed to protect Pennsylvanians from the health and safety risks of fracking.

However, after he assumed office as Governor in January 2023, Shapiro radically changed his environmental policy priorities and began to court fossil fuel companies. He failed to enact any of the recommendations put forth by the Grand Jury that he had previously promoted. He no longer publicly discusses the public health danger of the fossil fuel industry in the state. Instead, he has made dangerous side deals with fossil fuel companies instead of tightening badly needed state environmental regulation.

Here are the Pennsylvania Grand Jury's eight recommendations:

1. Expanding no-drill zones in Pennsylvania from the required 500 feet to 2,500 feet;
2. Requiring fracking companies to publicly disclose all chemicals used in drilling and hydraulic fracturing before they are used on-site;
3. Requiring the regulation of gathering lines, used to transport unconventional gas hundreds of miles;
4. Adding up all sources of air pollution in a given area to accurately assess air quality;
5. Requiring safer transport of the contaminated waste created from fracking sites;
6. Conducting a comprehensive health response to the effects of living near unconventional drilling sites;
7. Limiting the ability of Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection employees to be employed in the private sector immediately after leaving the Department;
8. Allowing the Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General original criminal jurisdiction over unconventional oil and gas companies.

Shapiro said when the report was released, "Our government has a duty to set, and enforce, ground rules that protect public health and safety. We are the referees, we are here to prevent big corporations and the powerful industries from harming our communities or running over the rights of citizens. When it comes to fracking, Pennsylvania failed. Now it's time to face the facts, and do what we can to protect the people of this commonwealth by encouraging the Department of Environmental Protection to partner with us and by passing the Grand Jurors' common-sense reforms."

Why has now-Governor Shapiro changed his position on the public health danger of the fossil fuel industry?

The *Wall Street Journal* [states](#) that Governor Shapiro is "...widely seen as having political aspirations beyond the state" and seems to want to keep the politically powerful fossil fuel industry on his side.

He has achieved this goal. The powerful American Petroleum Institute, the national fossil fuel lobbying firm, [applauds](#) him:

"We share Gov. Shapiro's goal of leveraging our state's abundant natural gas resources to help accelerate economic growth while delivering the affordable, reliable energy needed to power business and industry in Pennsylvania."

- January, 2024 statement by API Executive Director Stephanie Catarino Wissman

Neither a safe environment nor public health are mentioned anywhere in the API's statement.

The Evidence Is Clear: Fracking Is Dangerous to Human Health

Extensive studies of fossil fuel operations in Pennsylvania, including three recent, state-funded studies conducted by the University of Pittsburgh and the Pennsylvania Department of Health, show that Pennsylvanians who live near fracking have an elevated risk of childhood lymphoma, asthma, and low birth-weight babies.

Governor Shapiro refuses to discuss these studies as well as other pertinent climate research, and rather than instituting the findings of the Grand Jury report, has enacted risky, unproven measures such as allowing CNX Resources, a major fracking company, to regulate itself. See Shapiro Fact Sheet #1: A Troubling Deal Between PA Governor Shapiro and CNX Resources Allows Voluntary Self regulation of a Fracking Company.

Says PSR PA's Board President Ned Ketyer, "Ten months after the Pitt/DOH studies on fracking and health were released, the governor still has not offered a public comment on the studies his predecessor commissioned. It may be politically expedient for him to ignore the science, but it's irresponsible." Governor Shapiro now publicly disparages environmental advocates, calling them "extremists" in the Wall Street Journal.

"It's really like a Jekyll and Hyde thing since he was attorney general and governor," Shannon Smith, the executive director of FracTracker Alliance, told Inside Climate News. "If you compare the two, they're not even the same person."

Water Disasters in Dimock and New Freeport, Pennsylvania

Governor Shapiro has also turned a blind eye to two major groundwater disasters in Dimock and New Freeport, Pennsylvania.

Dimock, Pennsylvania:

The water in Dimock, Pennsylvania was contaminated with methane and other chemicals after gas drilling and fracking began in the area in 2006. The pollution caused health problems for residents, and the company that was responsible for the pollution was eventually held accountable.

In 2010, a consent decree was reached with the company, which forced it to provide water filters and banned it from drilling in a nine-square-mile area of Dimock.

In 2020, then-Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro charged Cabot Oil & Gas with polluting Dimock residents' water. The company pleaded no contest to the charges and was fined \$16.25 million.

In November, 2022: In a significant development, Coterra Energy (formerly Cabot Oil & Gas) finally took responsibility for contaminating Dimock's water supply. They pleaded no contest to environmental charges and agreed to pay \$16.3 million for a new water infrastructure project. Additionally, they will pay for residents' water bills for the next 75 years.

December, 2023: Controversial Permit to Drill Again: Despite the settlement, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) under Governor Shapiro allowed Coterra to resume drilling operations in Dimock, sparking outrage from residents and environmental groups. This decision came after a 12-year moratorium on drilling in the area.

Fourteen years after the initial pollution, the water supply in Dimock is still unusable because it is contaminated with methane from fracking.

There are efforts underway to provide clean water to the residents. A public water system is being built funded by the legal settlement with the company that polluted the water. In the meantime, residents rely on bottled water and individual filtration systems.

New Freeport, Pennsylvania:

- On June 19, 2022, a natural gas well in New Freeport migrated into an abandoned well, causing fracking fluid to spill out and contaminate the water supply of residents in the area.
- EQT, the company operating the well, initially denied responsibility and pledged to investigate the incident alongside the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.
- However, the investigation revealed significant levels of methane and ethane in private water supplies tested by Dr. John Stolz of Duquesne University, suggesting potential brine (fracking fluid) contamination.

Current situation:

- Most residents of New Freeport live outside the "zone of presumption," which means they are not required to be provided with replacement water by EQT.
- The DEP is continuing its investigation and has not yet issued a definitive assessment of the water quality.
- In the meantime, residents are facing challenges including rashes, foul water, and concerns about the long-term health effects of the contamination.
- Some residents have expressed frustration with the lack of communication and support from EQT and the DEP.
- The Center for Coalfield Justice has launched a [community water drive](#) to supply residents with water, which they have lacked since 2022.

Associated Press: [There Is Something Wrong Under Freeport](#)

Other Pennsylvania communities have also had their drinking water ruined by the fossil fuel industry.

East Palestine Train Derailment:

Governor Shapiro failed to effectively address residents' illness linked to chemical contamination after the February, 2023 East Palestine train derailment, which occurred near the Pennsylvania state line.

The Department of Environmental Protection refused to aid residents with health problems linked to chemical exposure if they lived outside an arbitrary one-by-two mile radius of the derailment. The chemicals spilled included 115,000 gallons of vinyl chloride, as well as ethylhexyl acrylate and butyl acrylate. Vinyl chloride (currently being considered for a [ban](#) by the EPA) is a known human carcinogen, and [exposure](#) can also harm the central nervous system. It can also irritate the eyes, mucous membranes, and respiratory tract, according to the [Centers for Disease Control](#).

According to a [University of Kentucky](#) study, 64% of adults and 63% of children in the area around the site developed new upper respiratory symptoms after the derailment. Many also developed rashes, sore throat, nausea, eye irritation, headache, cough, lethargy, and shortness of breath.

A plume map published by the [EPA](#) showed that even three days after the spill, the greatest concentrations of chemicals related to the accident were floating over Beaver County, Pennsylvania.

For more information: [Spotlight PA](#).

Governor Shapiro has made little effort to generate public enthusiasm or support effective climate solutions

Pennsylvania ranks 50th in renewable energy development according to the NGO Penn Future. The governor has little to promote solar or wind power, batteries, ecologic and sustainable, regenerative agriculture, or build EV charging stations to support electric cars.

Governor Shapiro is supporting rather than regulating the fossil fuel industry.

Governor Shapiro is actively promoting fracking by making deals with fossil fuel companies and promoting hydrogen hubs. Hydrogen hubs are networks of industrial operations meant to create hydrogen as a power source. However, the main component needed most frequently to create this hydrogen is methane gas, so the effort is seen by researchers and climate NGOs as an excuse to collect millions of dollars in infrastructure spending from the federal government and to frack additional gas in Pennsylvania. In addition, the process, known as “blue hydrogen,” creates carbon dioxide, which can cause asphyxiation. Under a new law (see below), families may be forced to store this dangerous gas on their properties, endangering themselves and their animals.

Pennsylvania Senate Bill 831: Storing Dangerous Carbon Dioxide Under Your House

Governor Shapiro recently signed the Carbon Dioxide Geologic Sequestration Primacy Act (formerly SB 831), which mandates a Carbon Capture scheme (a proposed hydrogen production system that has been debunked by experts such like noted climate expert and University of Pennsylvania professor Joe Romm) that would force Pennsylvanians to store dangerous CO2 gas in the ground beneath their homes if 75% of their neighbors agree to do so. This gas can and has escaped and can suffocate people.

Governor Shapiro Violates the Spirit of the Environmental Rights Amendment of 1971

The Environmental Rights Amendment of 1971, passed in response to previous environmental catastrophes in the state, reads:

The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all the people.

Governor Shapiro has permitted the pollution of Pennsylvania’s water and soil that may last for generations. He has neglected his duty to promote the health of all Pennsylvanians by refusing to recognize peer-reviewed public health research that shows that fossil fuel extraction is linked to cancer and other ills. If he did, he might require fracking and cracking to be halted until the health risks and climate risks were mitigated. He would also show support for his Department of Environmental Protection, confirming a permanent (rather than “acting”) secretary.

Resources:

- **Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania (not the national group)** <https://www.psrpa.org>
- **Center for Coalfield Justice:** <https://centerforcoalfieldjustice.org/>
- **PublicSource:** <https://www.publicsource.org/eqt-gas-play/>
- **Observer-Reporter:** <https://www.observer-reporter.com/>
- **Recent Pennsylvania studies showing that fossil fuel extraction and processing is dangerous to public health** <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/envirohealth/Pages/OilGas.aspx#:~:text=ONGP%20Information>
- **Associated Press article on health dangers of fossil fuel extraction:** <https://apnews.com/article/fracking-pennsylvania-health-environment-research-79dd7cfb9b3799e628b0c3667f30dcc4>
- **Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection:** <https://www.dep.pa.gov/>