



December 29, 2023

Hilde Crevits

Viceminister-president van de Vlaamse Regering en Vlaams minister van Welzijn,
Volksgezondheid en Gezin
Consciencegebouw, Koning Albert II laan 15, 1210 Sint-Joost-ten-Node, België

Zuhal Demir

Vlaams minister van Justitie en Handhaving, Omgeving, Energie en Toerisme
Seven - 6de verdieping, Koning Albert II laan 7
1210 Sint-Joost-ten-Node, België

Dear Viceminister-president Crevits and Vlaams minister Demir,

As organizations representing medical professionals, Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania (PSR PA) and Texas Physicians for Social Responsibility (Texas PSR) ask that decision-makers assessing the INEOS Project One proposal to take into account not only the impacts of the proposed plant on the people of Antwerp, but also the way that the proposed plant contributes to the expansion of natural gas extraction, transportation and processing in regions of the United States with the heaviest concentration of fossil fuel infrastructure.

The proposed Project One of INEOS will not only solidify the continued need for fracked gas, but also release large volumes of toxic chemicals into the air, threatening any progress on the climate crisis and clean air. Fracking, or hydraulic fracturing, and the development that comes with it has left a trail of destruction across America. According to FracTracker, as of 2014 this dangerous technique had been used on an estimated 32,000 wells across the United States, with Texas and Pennsylvania being the leaders in this industry. As such we feel that PSR PA and Texas PSR can speak directly to the impact it has had on the environment, public health and quality of life.

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Research has shown that the entire life cycle of the industry serves as a pathway for air, water and soil degradation, which in turn harms the health of people living in close proximity. From drilling, pipelines, storage, and processing to industrial uses such as gas-fired power and petrochemical/ethane cracker plants, toxic and radioactive contaminants are released. The process of hydraulic fracturing requires large quantities of water which strain already limited resources in places like the drought-ridden Permian Basin of Texas, while the cracks underground and seepage from pipelines and casings release gas and other chemicals, which poison aquifers and groundwater sources. In 2010, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP) blamed shoddy drilling practices by Coterra (formerly Cabot Oil and Gas) for methane contamination of a large aquifer in Dimock, polluting the drinking water of 19 families. After Coterra pleaded no contest for contaminating Dimock's drinking water, the PA DEP has allowed them to resume drilling after a 12-year moratorium, which again endangers the health of this community. Fracking has so destabilized the Permian Basin that the region registered 19 small earthquakes (at least 1 magnitude) in 2009 and now has near daily earthquakes of at least 2 in magnitude (strong enough to crack walls and foundations). There are no fault lines near the Permian Basin. In November 2023, the Permian registered the second largest earthquake in Texas history, at a magnitude 5.3.

According to the most recent edition of the *Compendium of Scientific, Medical, and Media Findings Demonstrating Risks and Harms of Fracking and Associated Gas and Oil Infrastructure*, more than 200 airborne chemical contaminants have been detected and air monitoring has confirmed high levels of toxic air pollutants in communities near fracking sites. These chemicals include hazardous air pollutants such as benzene, formaldehyde and fine particulate matter, which can damage respiratory, cardiovascular, and nervous systems. In Texas's Eagle Ford Shale, where Ineos operates 2,300 gas wells, researchers found that proximity to flaring events was strongly associated with preterm birth and low birth weight pregnancies. 400,000 people, predominantly Mexican-Americans, live within 5 kilometers of fracking wells in the Eagle Ford Shale. Also, in 2023, the University of Pittsburgh in Southwest Pennsylvania released three observational epidemiological studies which showed concerning associations between exposure to fracked gas activities and adverse health outcomes, including increased risk of asthma, rare childhood cancers, and adverse birth outcomes.

The Shell Pennsylvania Petrochemicals Complex, located in Beaver County, Pennsylvania, is an excellent example of promised cutting-edge technology gone wrong. The facility, which was expected to obtain the lowest achievable emissions, surpassed its rolling 12-month limitation for volatile organic compounds within its first few months of operation and was cited for over a dozen air violations and 43 malfunctions since the beginning of 2022. Flaring incidents on the

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384-acre complex have caused orange skies and are considered to be a source of air contaminants nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide and particulate matter to name a few. The toxins are known to cause fatigue, headaches and respiratory distress by reducing the blood's ability to carry oxygen. Studies have linked heavy exposure to certain volatile organic compounds to respiratory illness, cancer and cardiovascular disease and are extremely dangerous for vulnerable populations such as youth, seniors and those living with chronic disease.

Texas has so much petroleum and petrochemical infrastructure that is loosely regulated, it is difficult to capture the scope. Texas produces over 40 percent of US petroleum and 27 percent of US natural gas, while 9 percent of the US population resides in Texas. The oil and gas industry has a stranglehold on state and federal political leaders, in both major political parties. Texas passed legislation prohibiting “discrimination” against natural gas in building codes and local ordinances. When the people of Denton, Texas, a city of 150,000 residents within Texas’s mostly urban Barnett Shale, voted to prohibit fracking in their city, the state government nullified the local law. The expansions and additions to Texas’s massive gas processing and distribution network are planned for places that already have a disproportionate pollution burden from the oil and gas industry and will disproportionately impact African-American and Mexican-American communities.

As Pennsylvanians and Texans who lack the money and political power to reign in the expansion of fossil fuel extraction, processing and transportation within our borders, we ask for your help. As decision-makers assessing the INEOS Project One, you have the ability to oppose its development, which in turn will push back on the continued expansion of this poisonous and climate destroying industry.

Sincerely,

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