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Testimony for Control of VOC Emissions from Oil and Natural Gas Sources

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My name is Heath Asbury, and I live just outside of Pittsburgh in the borough of Aspinwall, a small community in the Allegheny River Valley. River valley communities in Allegheny County such as mine have been disproportionately affected by poor air quality and air pollutants. I am speaking to you today to urge the DEP to improve legislation to ensure the protection of our region's air. While there is much that could and should be done, I am asking specifically that the DEP take the following actions in order to reduce methane emissions:

- 1) Ensure that low-producing wells are frequently inspected and repaired in order to minimize the release of methane into our air.
- 2) Prohibit the reduction in the frequency of inspections based on prior inspection outcomes.

I have lived in the Pittsburgh region for the majority of my 47 years. My family is active outdoors, running, hiking, and biking in local parks and along the growing network of river and city trails in the area. During my lifetime, and even during the lives of my two teenage daughters, we have witnessed very disturbing trends in the quality of our region's air. All too frequently, I step out of my front door and immediately notice the unmistakable smell of air pollutants. I find myself logging poor air quality notifications on SmellPgh multiple times in a week. As summers become hotter, unhealthy ground level ozone levels are increasing. And as we are experiencing changes in our climate, we are seeing disturbing trends in the regions production and distribution of oil and gas. Where oil and gas is being drilled, compressed and processed you can find methane leaking along with volatile organic compounds (VOC). VOCs such as benzene are harmful to health and contribute to ground level ozone or smog that damages lungs.

I grew up in Indiana Township, about 15 minutes from downtown Pittsburgh, in a quiet valley where my parents purchased land in the early 1970's. Part of their attraction to the land where my father still lives in his 80's, was the clean water and air. Both of which are now at risk due to a Range Resources fracking well operation less than a mile

from the property, along with countless surface wells nearby. The view from my parent's living room window is now obscured by an enormous pump jack and holding tank on the edge of the neighbor's property.

Of all the harm caused by the recent oil and gas development, from the heavy truck traffic, to noise pollution, well fires and explosions, concerns for well and spring water, and unsightly well tanks and pump jacks, the most concerning aspect is the threat to our air quality. A threat that is pervasive and impossible to escape. It adversely affects the public health of the entire region. The warming climate will only make our region's air pollution problem worse. Common sense methane testing regulations will help Pennsylvania reach Governor Wolf's greenhouse emission reduction goals and put us on a path to reach goals set forth by the Paris Climate Agreement to mitigate the effects of a warming climate. As the Trump administration unravels vital pollution protections at the federal level, we are looking to our state leaders to enact safeguards to protect our public health. With all the other air quality challenges in our region including coal fired power, fine particulates from automobile exhaust, industrial pollution, and the erosion of federal air quality standards, it is imperative that we keep methane pollution to a minimum and place strict regulations on polluters.

The challenges to our region's air are clear and urgent. As a lifelong Pittsburgher, I have noticed a consistent decline in air quality. A decline that affects my family's daily life and the decisions we make. Is the air healthy enough today to go for a jog? Should I close my girls' windows because of the daily air quality report? Is it safe for my 85 year old father to sit on his deck at his house in the shadow of a seesawing pump jack a stone's throw away? In Indiana township specifically, but also in the entire region of Western PA, there is a stunning number of surface wells and drilling activities. We need the DEP to enact protections including the increased inspection and repair of existing wells, and for these inspections to remain in effect as these wells age.

Thank you for your time and for your consideration of this important public health topic.

Sincerely,

Heath Asbury