How does Air Pollution from the Oil and Gas Industry Affect the Health of People in Eastern Pennsylvania?

The US oil and gas industry dumps millions of tons of air pollutants into our air each year. This mix of pollutants includes methane, a very potent climate pollutant, and enormous amounts of toxic air pollutants and pollutants that cause ozone smog pollution. With nearly 10% of the nation’s oil and gas wells, compressors and processing plants located in the State, Pennsylvanians bear much of the health risks caused by oil and natural gas industry air pollution. For example, over 1,300 tons of hazardous toxic air pollution were emitted by oil and gas companies in Pennsylvania in 2011.

The impacts of oil and gas air pollution are felt in eastern Pennsylvania, even though this area is relatively distant from most oil and natural gas wells, compressor stations, and processing plants. Children living in this part of the state will suffer almost 16,000 asthma attacks each summer due to ozone smog generated from the air pollution released from oil and gas sites, according to a recent study. As shown at right, kids in every county are affected by this smog. Adults are also harmed, suffering from tens of thousands of days where they need to restrict their outdoor activities due to ozone smog from oil and gas.

There are many low cost, feasible ways for the oil and gas industry to greatly reduce pollution – and a number of states, such as Colorado and Wyoming, have adopted rules to make the industry clean up all of its operations, including older sites. These rules have not harmed the industry – new wells are still being drilled today in these states.

In contrast, Pennsylvania has no enforceable air pollution standards in place for the vast majority of oil and gas sites. Pennsylvania kids and adults need stronger state standards to reduce oil and gas air pollution.

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