

**Center for Coalfield Justice * Clean Air Council * Clean Water Action
* Conservation Voters of Pennsylvania * Delaware Riverkeeper Network
* Earthjustice * Earthworks * League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania
* Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper * Mountain Watershed Association
* Natural Resources Defense Council * PennEnvironment * Penn Future
* Save Our Streams * Sierra Club Pennsylvania Chapter**

Statement on passage of bill to eliminate environmental protection requirements for the oil and gas industry

Harrisburg, PA, June 16, 2016— The above-listed organizations, representing hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvanians, express their strong disappointment over the passage of SB 279 (the “Penn Grade Crude Development Advisory Council” bill), which passed the House and Senate yesterday and is expected to become law.

Pennsylvania now has the distinction of being the only state in the nation to abandon oil and gas regulations after they’ve been fully developed and vetted. Other states have done what will happen in Pennsylvania—added on to regulations to cover new shale (unconventional) operations—but have never exempted a class of current operations in the process.

SB 279 eliminates updated regulations for conventional oil and gas operations (25 PA Code Chapter 78) and diverts limited state resources to promote the industry by establishing an advisory council made up primarily of industry representatives.

This action will give industry undue influence on government and guarantee that any future regulations related to conventional drilling support industry’s interests. It also replicates past legislature-sanctioned industry advisory groups intended to prevent updated public health and environmental protections (such as for building codes).

The passage of SB 279 ignores a long public process and circumvents Pennsylvania’s regulatory system. Most importantly, it deprives Pennsylvania residents of much needed protections for their air, water, and health.

It is patently false for industry and proponents of SB 279 to claim that conventional operations are benign and sufficiently regulated by a law that is over 30 years old. All types of drilling can have negative environmental and health impacts. Modern-day conventional operations rely on hydraulic fracturing and use large volumes of chemicals and water. They generate toxic waste. Conventional well sites and processing involve industrial equipment that pollutes the air.

According to a new report, *Fossil Fumes*, by the Clean Air Task Force with support from the Alliance of Nurses for a Healthy Environment and Earthworks, 650,000 Pennsylvanians live in counties with an elevated cancer risk due to toxic emissions from oil and gas operations. The conventional industry accounts for 60-99 percent of all active wells in those counties.

Between 2008-2014, conventional operators were responsible for 60% of the cases in which oil and gas activities contaminated private water supplies. In 2014, conventional drillers were responsible for three-quarters of regulatory violations issued by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The conventional drilling industry has left Pennsylvania with a very expensive legacy of 200,000 abandoned wells, which can leak down into groundwater and up into the air.

The 178 legislators who voted for SB 279 contradicted the will of the nearly 30,000 Pennsylvanians who, over the course of nearly five years, testified at 12 public hearings and submitted predominantly supportive comments on new regulations for all operators. They ignored votes by public regulatory agencies, including the Environmental Quality Board and the Independent Regulatory Review Commission. In addition, they reversed recent decisions by the legislature, which twice directed the DEP to develop new oil and gas regulations. (In 2012 with the passage of Act 13 and in 2014 with the passage of Act 126.)

For years, Pennsylvanians have asked for stronger oil and gas regulations. The refusal by legislators to listen means that oil and gas operators will continue to operate with impunity and cause health and environmental problems across the Commonwealth. The passage of SB 279 is irresponsible and an affront to the public interest.

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