



**Physicians for Social Responsibility – New York**

23 January 2018

Commissioners  
Executive Director Steve Tambini  
Delaware River Basin Commission  
P.O. Box 7360  
25 Cosey Road  
West Trenton, NJ 08628

Dear Commissioners and Director Tambini,

We write to share with you a new compilation and analysis of scientific, health, and investigative findings about unconventional oil and gas development, or fracking. We represent health professionals and scientists who have followed closely the science and emerging data on this issue for many years. A rapidly growing body of evidence, including numerous studies published just in the past year, shows that the disposal of fracking waste, as well as drilling and fracking, threaten drinking water and put public health at risk.

These studies are a key component of the forthcoming Fifth Edition of the *Compendium of Scientific, Medical, and Media Findings Demonstrating Risks and Harms of Fracking*, the latest in a series of reports that have compiled, tracked, and summarized the evidence pertaining to the harms to health and the environment of fracking and associated development. With the Delaware River Basin Commission now considering the issue, we wished to send this section of the forthcoming report ahead of its full publication to help inform your important work. It is included with this letter.

Cases of drinking water sources contaminated by fracking activities are now proven. Studies have confirmed specific instances of water contamination by various pathways including spills,

discharge of fracking waste into rivers and streams, and underground migration of chemicals, including gas, into drinking water wells. Water contamination can also stem from well integrity failures caused by aging cement or the pressures of fracking itself.

As is currently drafted, the Commission's proposed rule to ban fracking in the Delaware River watershed, on the grounds that fracking exposes its waters to "significant, immediate, and long-term risks," has two important loopholes: it does not ban the importation of wastewater from fracking operations located outside the basin, nor does it prohibit water withdrawals from the Delaware River and its tributaries for export and use in such operations. We urge you to close these loopholes. The Delaware River provides drinking water to more than 15 million people—fully 5 percent of the U.S. population—and is the longest river in the northeast United States. Contamination of this watershed by fracking wastewater would represent a major potential threat to public health in communities throughout the eastern seaboard. Depletion of the water for fracking, and the increased industrial activity doing so entails, is counterproductive to the watershed's laudable protection and public benefit.

A 2017 study found that spills of fracking wastewater are common. Nationally, about 5 percent of all fracking wastewater is lost to spills, often during transport. Studies from Pennsylvania show that accidental spills and intentional discharges of fracking waste into surface water have profoundly altered the chemistry and ecology of streams throughout entire watersheds, increasing downstream levels of radioactive elements, heavy metals, endocrine disruptors, toxic disinfection byproducts, and acidity. Conventional water treatment practices do not remove these chemicals. At the same time, as is definitively documented in other studies, the disposal of fracking waste into deep injection wells can trigger earthquakes. There remains no good solution for the disposal or remediation of fracking wastewater; it certainly belongs nowhere near the Delaware River or any of its tributaries.

The *Compendium of Scientific, Medical, and Media Findings Demonstrating Risks and Harms of Fracking*, from which the attached document is drawn, compiles the significant and rapidly accumulating body of evidence demonstrating that drilling and fracking activities, including wastewater spills and disposal practices, pose serious risks of water contamination and harm to public health. To protect the Delaware River Watershed, we urge you to prohibit drilling and fracking, as well as all associated activities including importation of wastewater, its disposal, and water withdrawal. We hope that this information is helpful as you address this issue, and we would be glad to discuss it further and answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Concerned Health Professionals of New York  
[www.concernedhealthny.org](http://www.concernedhealthny.org)

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