

PHYSICIANS FOR POLICY ACTION

June 30, 2017

Governor Charlie Baker
Massachusetts State House
Office of the Governor, Room 280
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Proposed Spectra/Enbridge natural gas compressor station in Weymouth

Dear Governor Baker,

We write to you as co-leaders of Physicians for Policy Action, a health advocacy group of more than 100 physicians based at Harvard Medical School. We wish to alert you to our concerns about the health risks of the proposed Spectra/Enbridge natural gas compressor station in Weymouth and to urge you to obtain an independent comprehensive health impact assessment of the project before issuing state permits for the initiation of construction.

An increasing body of peer-reviewed medical studies demonstrates that there are serious health concerns around natural gas production, infrastructure and leaks, including the elaboration of known carcinogens (such as benzene), lead, and particulate matter¹; pollution of drinking water²; and the release of methane with its associated impact on climate change³. Recently, a population-based study from Colorado identified an association between pediatric acute lymphocytic leukemia and proximity to active natural gas wells⁴. A 2016 study from the Geisinger Health System in Pennsylvania showed that prenatal residential exposure to natural gas development activity was associated with preterm birth⁵. Additional studies have demonstrated associations between residential proximity to natural gas production and asthma and increased hospitalization rates^{6,7}.

Because of these data, the Massachusetts Medical Society, the American Medical Association, the Massachusetts Nurses' Association and more than 30 Massachusetts boards of health have called for health impact assessments prior to construction of natural gas infrastructure, such as the proposed Spectra/Enbridge natural gas compressor station.

A health impact assessment is essential to fully understand the potential health risks of a proposed project to the nearby population and is particularly relevant for the Spectra/Enbridge compressor station, which is in immediate proximity to a densely-populated community with homes, schools and daycare centers. Moreover, data presented last month by a citizen-scientist, Dr. Curt Nordgaard, demonstrated that eight

PHYSICIANS FOR POLICY ACTION

volatile organic compounds, including benzene, were detectable in air samples from Weymouth and Braintree at levels exceeding DEP standards *prior to* the construction of the proposed compressor station⁸. These communities are therefore especially vulnerable to the deleterious effects of further commercial infrastructure such as the proposed compressor station.

With this letter, we reach out to you to share our professional concerns on this matter, as physicians who care for residents of the South Shore of Boston. We are keenly aware of the personal impact of asthma flares, childhood cancers and pregnancy complications, and we desire a safe and healthy environment for our patients.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Regina LaRocque, MD MPH
Nesli Basgoz, MD
Kathryn Hibbert, MD
C. Corey Hardin, MD PhD

www.physiciansforpolicyaction.org

References:

1. "Too Dirty, Too Dangerous: Why Health Professionals Reject Natural Gas" Physicians for Social Responsibility, February 2017
2. "Hydraulic Fracture for Oil and Gas: Impacts from the Hydraulic Fracturing Water Cycle on Drinking Water Resources in the United States" U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, December 2016
3. Phillips N et al. Mapping urban pipeline leaks: methane leaks across Boston. *Environmental Pollution*. February 2013:1-4.
4. McKenzie L et al. Childhood hematologic cancer and residential proximity to oil and gas development. *PLoS One*. February 2017
5. Casey JA et al. Unconventional natural gas development and birth outcomes in Pennsylvania, USA. *Epidemiology*. March 2016;27(2):163-72.
6. Rasmussen S et al. Association between unconventional natural gas development in the Marcellus Shale and asthma exacerbations. *JAMA Internal Medicine*. 2016;176(9)
7. Jemielita T et al. Unconventional gas and oil drilling is associated with increased hospital utilization rates. *PLoS One*. July 2015.10(7):e0131093
8. "Toxins detected in air near Fore River Basin, doctor says" Patriot Ledger May 31, 2017