

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PROJECT

DEFENDING PUBLIC HEALTH SINCE 2012

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Still Room for Frontline Community Protections in Gov. Shapiro's "Lightning" Energy Plan

While there is much to celebrate in Gov. Shapiro's plan, it leaves open the opportunity to prioritize public health, which will lower the risk of health harms for families living in frontline communities – and for all Pennsylvanians.

Background

On January 30, Gov. Josh Shapiro announced his "[Lightning Plan](#)," a comprehensive proposal meant to address Pennsylvania's energy future and promote a wide array of energy projects in the commonwealth. Elements of the plan were reflected in Shapiro's [proposed 2025-2026 budget](#), released on February 4.

Environmental Health Project Statement

Alison L. Steele, Executive Director

Gov. Shapiro's "Lightning Plan" proposes an "all of the above" approach to securing Pennsylvania's energy future, parts of which may benefit the health of Pennsylvanians. Climate emissions reductions, faster approval and tax credits for renewable energy projects, and standards that incentivize the next generation of energy will all help to improve public health. The plan also calls for rebates and incentives for consumers to buy new energy efficient appliances and other goods that reduce energy use. Energy efficiency is always a good approach – the cheapest, cleanest, and healthiest kilowatt-hour is the one not used. We applaud these steps that will support a just transition to a renewable energy economy and secure jobs for the Commonwealth.

Other components of the Lightning Plan, however, fall short in protecting public health. As in the past, the Shapiro Administration continues to define "clean energy" broadly to include fossil fuels, such as shale gas. Shale gas is used as feedstock in certain hydrogen, petrochemical, and aviation fuel plants operating or proposed in Western Pennsylvania and other areas of the state. The incentives in Shapiro's plan give these industrial complexes the ability to add to Pennsylvania's existing pollution problems.

When it comes to energy, there must be a reckoning with how we define "clean." Because of what we know about pervasive infrastructure leaks and climate risks associated with unburned methane, any claim that fracked gas is a realistic climate solution is patently false. Pollution

from shale gas operations hastens climate change, producing more devastating storms, floods, heatwaves, fires, and insect-borne diseases – putting public health at risk for all Pennsylvanians and, indeed, for people across the globe.

Meanwhile, families who live in proximity to the vast network of gas wells, processing plants, compressor stations, pipelines, storage facilities, petrochemical operations, and other infrastructure continue to be exposed to pollution that raises the risk of health harms. [Research](#) shows associations between shale gas development and an array of health impacts, including poor birth outcomes, asthma exacerbation, heart failure and high blood pressure, stress and mental health issues, and cancer. At least [one study](#) also suggests that continued shale gas development has weakened, rather than strengthened, the local economy and contributed to reductions in population and jobs. Furthermore, there has historically been little to no meaningful government engagement with communities when making decisions about the infrastructure they will host, even though their residents will bear the brunt of those decisions in the form of adverse health impacts.

Ultimately there needs to be consideration for public health ramifications with any of these proposed energy actions. A major part of that consideration must be meaningful engagement with the communities hosting energy infrastructure, whatever it is, to ensure equity in decision-making processes and to prioritize public health in places where it is most at risk. Gov. Shapiro has an opportunity to show courageous leadership in a way none of his predecessors have since the beginning of the shale gas boom: by meaningfully engaging with nearby communities any time energy infrastructure is proposed and by making sure that “clean” means “safe” for the vast majority of Pennsylvanians.

About EHP

The [Environmental Health Project](#) (EHP) is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization that defends public health in the face of shale gas development. EHP provides frontline communities with timely monitoring, interpretation, and guidance while engaging diverse stakeholders: health professionals, researchers, community organizers, public servants, and others.