ONGP — Frequently Asked Questions

**ONGP in Pennsylvania**

ONGP is a significant industry in Pennsylvania. The latest wave of ONGP activity in the state began in 2005 with the start of unconventional oil and natural gas development (UONGD). Unconventional wells differ from conventional wells by the geologic formation being tapped. They use horizontal and vertical drilling and hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) to access traditionally unavailable reservoirs of oil and natural gas.

There are approximately 10,200 active unconventional wells in the state, with an average of 70 wells added each month. Thirty-four of Pennsylvania’s 67 counties have active unconventional wells, primarily in the northeast and southwest parts of the state. Seventeen percent of the state’s active unconventional wells are in Washington County, followed by 15 percent, 13 percent, and 12 percent in Susquehanna, Greene and Bradford counties.

Pennsylvania also has more than 116,600 active conventional wells located in 40 counties. Sixteen percent of the state’s conventional wells are in Warren County, followed by 12 percent, 10 percent, and 9 percent in McKean, Indiana and Venango counties.*

**ONGP Health Registry**

The Pennsylvania Department of Health’s (DOH) Division of Environmental Health Epidemiology has developed a confidential, voluntary ONGP health registry to better track and respond to public health complaints related to ONGP. Those who wish to make a complaint will be interviewed over the phone by a DOH employee. The Environmental Health team, including the state toxicologist, can then assess environmental testing results and/or clinical records to determine if a health risk is present.

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* Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Spud Report, Wells by County, 1/2/2019

**Q: Where can I find the location of ONGP activities?**

A: ONGP activities are occurring throughout Pennsylvania. Unconventional and conventional oil and natural gas wells are in the northeast, northcentral and southwest parts of the state. Pipelines run across the entire length of the state, and oil refineries can be found in the southeast corner. The following resources provide maps of ONGP infrastructure in Pennsylvania:

- **Wells:** DEP Oil and Gas Mapping
  [http://www.depgis.state.pa.us/PaOilAndGasMapping/](http://www.depgis.state.pa.us/PaOilAndGasMapping/)
  Locations of unconventional, conventional, injection and storage wells

- **Pipelines:** USDOT National Pipeline Mapping System
  [https://www.npms.phmsa.dot.gov/](https://www.npms.phmsa.dot.gov/)
  Locations of pipelines regulated by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC)

**Q: What chemicals are used in fracking?**

A: Pennsylvania participates with FracFocus as the official chemical disclosure registry which lists most chemicals used in hydraulically fractured wells in the state. Hundreds of chemicals are searchable on fracfocus.org. The registry is mandatory for operators, but some chemicals used in fracking are considered proprietary, meaning the operators do not have to disclose them.

**Q: Will DOH sample my water, air or soil?**

A: No, DOH is not able to sample at this time. DEP is the state agency that conducts environmental sampling related to ONGP (per guidelines available at [http://www.depgreenport.state.pa.us/elibrary/GetDocument?docId=7758&DocName=STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR IDENTIFYING, TRACKING, AND RESOLVING OIL AND GAS VIOLATIONS.PDF](http://www.depgreenport.state.pa.us/elibrary/GetDocument?docId=7758&DocName=STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR IDENTIFYING, TRACKING, AND RESOLVING OIL AND GAS VIOLATIONS.PDF)). Also, Penn State Extension has a useful guide for testing private water wells (available through [http://extension.psu.edu/water](http://extension.psu.edu/water)) and an iPhone app called H2O Solutions.

**Q: Who regulates my drinking water?**

A: If you receive water from a public water system, DEP’s Bureau of Safe Drinking Water regulates your water in accordance with the federal and state Safe Drinking Water Act. The federal drinking water regulations and standards developed by EPA are available at [https://www.epa.gov/dwstandardsregulations](https://www.epa.gov/dwstandardsregulations). Please note that in Pennsylvania, most private water supplies (e.g., private well, spring water, etc.) are not regulated. EPA regulations are not legally enforceable in this situation.
Q: Who regulates air quality?
A: DEP’s Bureau of Air Quality regulates ambient (outdoor) air in accordance with the federal Clean Air Act and the Pennsylvania Air Pollution Control Act. EPA has developed National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for six common air pollutants (https://www.epa.gov/criteria-air-pollutants/naaqs-table). Current ambient air monitoring may not detect short-term air pollution, even at high levels.

Q: Where can I learn about the health effects of different contaminants I may be exposed to in my drinking water or air?
A: Select fact sheets on common environmental contaminants are available on the DOH website. The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) publishes fact sheets for a wider range of chemicals that are available at https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/. And EPA has a website for Chemicals and Toxics Topics available at https://www.epa.gov/environmental-topics/chemicals-and-toxics-topics. Also, EPA recently released its report on hydraulic fracturing chemicals and impacts on drinking water (https://www.epa.gov/hfstudy).

Q: What research has been done on the health effects of ONGP?
A: Research on the health effects of ONGP, specifically unconventional shale development, has been growing over the last five years. You can find the research online using the following resources:
- Concerned Health Professionals of NY’s Compendium of Scientific, Medical, and Media Findings Demonstrating Risks and Harms of Fracking (http://concernedhealthny.org/compendium/)

Q: What can I do if my drinking water or air is contaminated?
A: If your drinking water is found to be contaminated, find an alternative water source like bottled water. Consider installing a proper water treatment system as indicated by your water test results. If possible, connect to a public water system.

If the air outside of your home is found to be contaminated, keep windows closed and use air conditioning or central heat with a high-efficiency air filter, if possible.

If you have not already done so, contact DEP, county or local officials, the oil and gas drilling companies, emergency services, and DOH. In addition, an environmental health physician and/or toxicologist may be able to provide information about the health risks of your current water or ambient air given up-to-date environmental test results.

Q: What resources are available to me if I want to connect to a public water system?
A: Contact your local borough to learn about the availability of municipal water systems in your area. The Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) provides grants to low-income municipalities for small water and sewer infrastructure projects. Although not available for individual homeowners, this grant could be used by the municipality to connect multiple homeowners to a public water system. Consider approaching your municipal officials about applying for the Small Water and Sewer Program. You can find information about the grant at https://dced.pa.gov/programs/pa-small-water-sewer/. You can also find a list of all Pennsylvania state grant opportunities at https://boroughs.org/subpage.php?link=State%20Grant%20Opportunities.
Q: Can you refer me to an environmental health physician?
A: Yes, here are some environmental health physicians around and near Pennsylvania:

1) DR. EDWARD MCVAY
   St. Vincent’s Health System, Erie
   814-452-7879
   emcvay@svhs.org

2) DR. THEODORE “TED” THEM
   Guthrie Clinic, Sayre
   570-887-2495
   Them_theodore@guthrie.org

3) DR. ANTHONY PIZON
   University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh
   412-864-2067 (assistant)
   412-864-5382 (clinic coordinator)
   pizona@upmc.edu

4) DR. MARILYN HOWARTH
   University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
   215-808-2165
   howarthmv@gmail.com
   marilyn.howarthmd@uphs.penn.edu

5) DR. CHARLES WERTNZ
   West Virginia University
   Morgantown, WV
   304-293-3693
   cwertz@hsc.wvu.edu

An appointment with an environmental health physician does not replace a visit with your primary care provider. Please check with your health insurance before making an appointment to determine your financial liability.

Q: What can I do about an abandoned well on my property?
A: Act 13 (2012) of Pennsylvania’s oil and gas law established the Marcellus Legacy Fund to plug orphan or abandoned wells that have the potential to impact human health. The Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) administers the program that allows municipalities, higher education institutions, for-profit businesses, watershed organizations and other authorized organizations to apply on behalf of themselves or private citizens. For more information, see http://community.newpa.com/programs/orphan-abandoned-well-plugging-program-oawp/.

Q: What do I do if I have another question that hasn’t been answered?
A: Please contact the Division of Environmental Health Epidemiology at DOH. We will update this document periodically. The next page provides contact information for DOH and DEP.
Contact Us

Division of Environmental Health Epidemiology

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Room 933, Health and Welfare Building
625 Forster St.
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0701
724-662-6068
717-787-3350
ev.health.concern@pa.gov
https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/envirohealth

To be part of our ONGP health registry, contact the Environmental Health team above

Our district and county health offices may be able to connect you to additional resources in your area:

Northwest District
19 McQuiston Drive
Jackson Center, PA 16133-1635
724-662-6068

Northcentral District
Water Tower Square
1000 Commerce Park Drive, Ste 109
Williamsport, PA 17701-5475
570-327-3400

Northeast District
655 Carey Ave.
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18706-5485
570-826-2062

Southwest District
233 West Otterman St.
Greensburg, PA 15601-2305
724-830-2701

Southcentral District
30 Kline Plaza
Harrisburg, PA 17104-1530
717-787-8092

Southeast District
Room 442, Reading State Building
625 Cherry St.
Reading, PA 19602-1152
610-378-4352

Allegheny County
542 Fourth Ave.
Pittsburgh, PA 15219-2111
412-687-ACHD (2243)

Erie County
606 West Second St.
Erie, PA 16507-1111
814-451-6700

Office of Oil and Gas Management

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

16th floor, Rachel Carson State Office Building
P.O. Box 2063
Harrisburg, PA 17105-2063
717-772-2199
ra-epoilandgas@pa.gov
https://www.dep.pa.gov/oilandgas

For oil and gas complaints, call 1-866-255-5158
For general environmental complaints, call 1-888-723-3721 (OR 1-800-541-2050 for emergencies)

The oil and gas district offices may be able to connect you to additional resources in your area:

Northwest District
230 Chestnut St.
Meadville, PA 16335-3481
814-332-6860

Easter District
208 West Third St.
Williamsport, PA 17701-6448
570-327-3636

Southwest District
400 Waterfront Drive
Pittsburgh, PA 15222-4745
412-442-4024