

UONGD — Frequently Asked Questions

UONGD background

Unconventional wells are distinct from conventional wells by the geologic formation being tapped. Unconventional wells use horizontal and vertical drilling and hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) to access traditionally unavailable reservoirs of oil and natural gas. But UONGD involves more than just wells — it is a complex network of wells, pipelines, compressor stations, processing plants, wastewater storage, etc. used to collect and transport natural gas to consumers.

UONGD in Pennsylvania

UONGD began in Pennsylvania in 2005. As of Oct. 31, 2017, there were 9,353 active unconventional wells in the state. Thirty-four of Pennsylvania’s 67 counties had active unconventional wells, primarily in the northeast and southwest parts of the state. Washington County had the most active unconventional wells (1,584) followed by Susquehanna (1,310), Greene (1,176) and Bradford (1,146) counties (Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection [DEP] SPUD Report, Wells by County, 11/2/2017 point-in-time).

UONGD health complaints registry

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

Q: Where can I find information on where UONGD is occurring?

A: The following resources provide maps of current UONGD infrastructure in Pennsylvania:

- Wells: PADEP Oil and Gas Mapping
<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/>
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 state chemical disclosure registry which lists most chemicals used in fracking. Hundreds of chemicals are searchable on fracfocus.org. Also, the EPA recently released its report on hydraulic fracturing chemicals and impacts on drinking water (available here: <https://www.epa.gov/hfstudy>).

Q: Will DEHE sample my water, air or soil?

A: No, DEHE is not able to sample at this time. DEP conducts environmental sampling related to UONGD complaints (see contact information on last page of this FAQ). Also, Penn State Extension has a useful guide for testing private water wells (available here: <http://extension.psu.edu/natural-resources/water/drinking-water/water-testing/testing/testing-your-drinking-water>).

Q: Where can I find information about specific contaminants I may be exposed to (e.g., in my drinking water)?

A: Select fact sheets on arsenic, barium, manganese, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and other environmental contaminants are available on the DEHE website. The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) publishes fact sheets for a wider range of chemicals (available here: <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/index.asp>).

Please note that in Pennsylvania, private water wells are not regulated. Drinking water standards available from ATSDR or the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) only apply to public drinking water.

Q: Can you refer me to an environmental health physician?

A: Yes, DEHE recommends the following regional environmental health affiliates:

North-
east

Dr. Theodore (“Ted”) Them, Guthrie Clinic, Sayre
570-887-2495
Them_theodore@guthrie.org

North-
west

Dr. Edward McVay, St. Vincent’s Health System, Erie
814-452-7879
emcvay@svhs.org

South-
east

Dr. Marilyn Howarth, Center of Excellence in Environmental Toxicology
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
215-808-2165
howarthmv@gmail.com; marilyn.howarthmd@uphs.penn.edu

South-
west

Dr. Anthony Pizon, Chief of Toxicology in the Department of Emergency Medicine
University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh
412-864-2067 (assistant); 412-864-5382 (clinic coordinator)
pizonaf@upmc.edu

West
Virginia

Dr. Charles Werntz, Occupational and Environmental Health Sciences and Occupational Medicine
West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV
304-293-3693
cwerntz@hsc.wvu.edu

Please note that having an appointment with an environmental health physician does not replace visiting your primary care provider. Also, 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/>.



A Cabot unconventional well pad in Pennsylvania, 2014

Source: <https://stateimpact.npr.org/pennsylvania/files/2014/02/>

Contacting the Pennsylvania Department of Health

To file a formal health complaint as part of the UONGD health registry, please contact the Division of Environmental Health Epidemiology within the Bureau of Epidemiology:

Room 933, Health and Welfare Building
625 Forster St.
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0701

717-787-3350
env.health.concern@pa.gov

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

Northwest District

(serving Cameron, Clarion, Clearfield, Crawford, Elk, Forest, Jefferson, Lawrence, McKean, Mercer, Venango and Warren counties)

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

Southwest District

(serving Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Cambria, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Somerset, Washington and Westmoreland counties)

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

Allegheny County Health Dept

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

Northcentral District

(serving Bradford, Centre, Clinton, Columbia, Lycoming, Montour, Northumberland, Potter, Snyder, Sullivan, Tioga and Union counties)

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

Southcentral District

(serving Adams, Bedford, Blair, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, Lebanon, Mifflin, Perry and York counties)

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

Erie County Health Dept

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

Northeast District

(serving Carbon, Lackawanna, Lehigh, Luzerne, Monroe, Northampton, Pike, Susquehanna, Wayne and Wyoming counties)

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

Southeast District

(serving Berks, Delaware, Lancaster and Schuylkill counties)

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

Contacting the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection

To file an oil and gas complaint, please contact the Office of Oil and Gas Management:

Bureau of Oil and Gas Planning and Program Management

P.O. Box 8765

Harrisburg, PA 17105-8765

Oil and gas complaints: 1-866-255-5158

General number: 717-772-2199

To report a general environmental complaint, call 1-888-723-3721 (OR 1-800-541-2050 for emergencies).

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

Northwest District

(serving Butler, Clarion, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Forest, Jefferson, Lawrence, McKean, Mercer, Venango and Warren counties)

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

Southwest District

(serving Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Cambria, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Somerset, Washington and Westmoreland counties)

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

Eastern District

(serving all other counties)

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