

New Haven Environmental Justice Network



“Protecting Urban Environments”

608 Whitney Avenue
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**Connecticut General Assembly Joint Committee on Environment
Testimony Re: Fracking Waste Legislation, SB 237**

In our work over the last fifteen years fighting to keep toxic pollution out of New Haven, we have learned that the most severe impacts of any kind of pollution are inevitably experienced by urban communities. Among the toxic burdens already faced by New Haven residents: a 480 Megawatt power plant, sewage sludge incinerator, two interstate highways, a major regional port with heavy diesel traffic, multiple cement batching plants and transfer stations. These mobile and stationary sources have contributed to air quality that is in non-attainment for both tropospheric ozone and particulate matter, and the highest rate of asthma hospitalization in Connecticut. Water quality is no better, with 257 million gallons of raw sewage from combined sewer overflows pouring into New Haven’s waterways each year. The potential for additional pollution from fracking waste could make this already intolerable situation even worse.

Is it plausible that fracking waste would end up in New Haven? New Haven’s sewer authority was regionalized in 2005 for budgetary reasons, resulting in diluted local control; now more than 40% of the volume processed by the regional authority (known as GNHWPCA) comes from outside sludge contracts (including non-constituent municipalities more than 50 miles away), which were supposed to be temporary and phased out in 2014. Instead GNHWPCA is planning a \$50 million expansion that will give it the capacity to import even more outside sludge, and potentially other forms of waste. We have little doubt that if treatment of fracking waste becomes lucrative enough, cash-strapped wastewater authorities such as GNHWPCA will get into the business. GNHWPCA’s main treatment facility and incinerator is less than a mile from densely populated, low-income neighborhoods in Fair Haven and the Annex, and within a stone’s throw of the delicate ecosystem of Long Island Sound.

The experience of wastewater authorities processing fracking waste in Pennsylvania is a cautionary tale. In May 2011, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection recommended that the state’s

wastewater treatment plants stop processing “produced water” from hydraulic fracturing. The request came in response to public concern over elevated bromide levels in the Monongahela River watershed—an area with several local wastewater authorities that treat fracking waste. Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh analyzed water from treatment facilities that initially processed fracking wastewater and then later complied with the state’s recommendation. Concentrations of chemicals known to occur in gas production dropped significantly after the plants stopped accepting the fracking waste. At a municipal plant in Greene County, average barium concentrations fell from 5.99 to 0.14 mg/L. When the plants continued to handle the fracking waste, levels of several of the chemicals exceeded drinking water standards set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. At the Greene County plant, the levels of barium and strontium, two toxic metals found in fracking wastewater, were on average 5.99 and 48.3 mg/L, respectively. EPA drinking water standards for these metals are 2 and 4 mg/L, respectively. Until state regulators stepped in, the elevated levels of heavy metals were being released into the Monongahela River and other local waterways as effluent from wastewater treatment facilities.

Connecticut should not go down this road. Environmentally overburdened communities like New Haven cannot rely on cash-strapped local wastewater authorities to voluntarily make the right decisions with respect to processing toxic waste. Therefore we urge you to ban -- or at minimum to adopt strict regulations for -- the treatment, storage and disposal of fracking waste in the state of Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

New Haven Environmental Justice Network Steering Committee

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