

*Kingston, NY* - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today announced he is sending a letter to President Barack Obama signed by more than 20 of his House colleagues calling for stronger protections from air pollution caused by shale gas drilling. The letter calls for the finalization of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) New Source Performance Standards, which will address growing air pollution and public health impacts related to the rapid expansion of drilling in the United States, and ensure these standards are strong.

"New Yorkers from the Southern Tier to the Hudson Valley have listened to the horror stories of families who have seen their air polluted by gas drillers and they don't like it one bit," said Hinchey. "We need the President to act immediately to sign off on the proposed air quality standards so that these drillers cannot pollute our air without consequence. We cannot let the rush to drill blind us from the need to ensure the safety of our environment and public health."

Shale gas drilling emits significant quantities of pollutants, including smog-forming chemicals, Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC's), hazardous air pollutants such as benzene, and the potent greenhouse gas methane. These pollutants contribute to serious health problems. Just last month for example, the Colorado School of Public Health concluded a report based on three years of monitoring. The report found higher cancer, respiratory and neurological health risks (including headaches, chronic dizziness, eye irritation and difficulty breathing) among people living closest to drilling sites. The analysis found residents near wells faced volatile organic chemicals at five times the level at which the emissions are considered potentially harmful to public health, according to the federal Environmental Protection Agency's Hazard Index. The Medical Society of New York has recently urged caution with expanded drilling, underlining experienced health impacts and the need for more study on those impacts before more drilling moves forward. Even the government's own science has shown increased ground level ozone and other pollution as a result of drilling, with data collected by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The EPA's proposed New Source Performance Standards would take an important step toward reducing health-harming pollution. When fully implemented, these rules would cause significant air pollution reductions, including: 540,000 tons of smog-forming chemicals, an industry-wide reduction of 25 percent; 38,000 tons of toxic air pollutants, an industry-wide reduction of almost 30 percent, and; 3.4 million tons of methane, an industry-wide reduction of about 26 percent. The lion's share of these reductions come from ending the wasteful practice of venting or flaring pollution from new hydraulically fractured gas wells directly into the atmosphere. The rules instead require companies to capture these emissions, a time-tested technique that can be readily implemented.

Earlier this year, Hinchey asked President Obama to back stronger environmental and public health standards to protect against the risks of hydraulic fracturing. The congressman has also called for an expansion of the ongoing EPA study, which he jumpstarted through legislation that was signed into law in 2010. The current plan does not include a study of air pollution and other health risks that have been closely associated with fracking.

Hinchey is a leader in the effort to protect drinking water and the environment from the risks of hydraulic fracturing. He is a co-author of the FRAC Act, which would mandate public disclosure of chemicals used in frack fluid and allow the EPA to regulate fracking activities under the Safe Drinking Water Act. Hinchey also recently called on the State of New York to withdraw its proposed rules that would allow for new high-volume, hydraulic fracturing in the Marcellus Shale. Hinchey believes the proposed rules fail to address many of his concerns with the initial draft and also do not account for new information that has been discovered about the environmental, public health and economic risks associated with the natural gas drilling activity.

The full text of Hinchey's letter follows:

Dear President Obama:

We write today to urge your administration to finalize the EPA's New Source Performance Standards to address growing air pollution and public health impacts related to the rapid expansion of drilling in the United States, and ensure these standards are strong. This rapid expansion, largely related to new types of hydraulic fracturing, is increasingly occurring adjacent to population centers including private residences and schools, with reported health problems growing in tandem. Your administration has taken a strong stand in valuing science driven policy that protects public health and agency directive, we hope you will continue that standard with this decision.

This industry emits significant quantities of pollutants, including smog-forming chemicals, Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC's), hazardous air pollutants such as benzene, and the potent greenhouse gas methane. These pollutants contribute to serious health problems. Just last month for example, the Colorado School of Public Health concluded a report based on three years of monitoring that found higher cancer, respiratory and neurological health risks (including headaches, chronic dizziness, eye irritation and difficulty breathing) among people

living closest to wells. The analysis found residents near wells faced volatile organic chemicals at five times the level at which the emissions are considered potentially harmful to public health, according to the federal Environmental Protection Agency's Hazard Index. The Medical Society of New York has recently urged caution with expanded drilling, underlining experienced health impacts and the need for more study on those impacts before more drilling moves forward. Even the government's own science has shown increased ground level ozone and other pollution as a result of drilling, with data collected by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

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Because gas companies would achieve these reductions largely by capturing emissions before they escape, they can both reduce waste and pollution. In fact, the EPA estimates that because the value of captured product exceeds the cost of compliance, the proposed rules would yield a net annual savings of almost \$30 million. With the industry seeing record growth and profits, a policy with such minimal if not positive economic impacts such as this, should not be opposed.

Although these rules are an important step, they could go even further to cut air pollution from oil and gas wells. The Secretary of Energy Advisory Board Shale Gas Production Subcommittee found that the rules are "a critical step forward in reducing emissions of smog-forming pollutants and air toxics" but fall short of its recommendations because they do not directly regulate methane emissions and only address pollution from new, not existing, gas infrastructure.

We respectfully urge your administration to finalize these important rules as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Maurice D. Hinchey