



April 5, 2017

Dear Board of Health Members:

Attached please find a letter for Boards of Health to consider signing about interstate gas pipelines. MAHB is partnering with the Sierra Club in this outreach. If you wish to participate, please sign and return to Emily Norton, at the email address below.

During the past few years, two new interstate gas pipelines were proposed to be built in Massachusetts. One, Northeast Energy Direct, was cancelled. The other proposed pipeline, Access Northeast, has been stalled after the MA Supreme Judicial Court ruled that state law does not allow a tariff to be imposed on electric bills to pay for new interstate gas pipelines.

New projects continue to be built or proposed however: the Metering and Regulating station in West Roxbury; expansions of existing infrastructure in Acushnet; and compressor stations in Rehoboth and Weymouth.

The negative health impacts associated with high pressure fracked gas infrastructure (FGI) are well documented.

Health risks of FGI include asthma and heart disease from particulate matter, neurologic disease and miscarriage due to heavy metals, and cancer due to carcinogens such as benzene and radioactive radon and lead. These health consequences are a hazard for the communities that abut the FGI, but also, due to meteorologic effects, for more distant communities, particularly due to leaks in our aging pipeline infrastructure.

Health risks posed by FGI directly undermine the stated goals of our Massachusetts Department of Public Health: combatting health disparities, promoting health, and targeting programs for the best utilization of resources. Pipeline infrastructure exacerbates health disparities, potentially creates considerable negative health impacts, and diverts scarce public health resources because of the illnesses they create.

There is concern the Baker Administration will propose a change in law or regulation in order to enable new natural gas pipelines or otherwise encourage pipeline companies to bring new interstate gas pipelines to Massachusetts. That is why a strong showing from Boards of Health on a letter urging support for clean renewable energy rather than more fossil fuel infrastructure is so important.

It would be ideal if you could take up a discussion of whether to sign on at your next Board meeting.

If your Board votes to sign on to the letter, please let us know as soon as possible.

As it is a monumental task to collect signatures from up to 351 Boards of Health, we are partnering with Sierra Club to handle this task. Please email Emily Norton at emily.norton@sierraclub.org if your Board is interested in signing onto the letter below.

Please do not sign and send the letter directly to the Governor. We would like to send one letter with a plurality of Boards of Health listed as signatories.

We understand reasonable people have different opinions on the issue. We think it is appropriate, however, for us to give Boards of Health that would oppose new interstate natural gas pipelines the opportunity to speak with one voice on the matter to the Governor.

We will keep the letter open for sign-on through the end of May. If your Board needs more time to decide whether to sign on, or you have questions or comments about this, please let me or Emily know.

Thank you,

Marcia Benes
Executive Director
MAHB

See next page for letter

Sign on Letter to Governor Baker

Dear Governor Baker:

We write to you as Boards of Health from communities across Massachusetts who are committed to protecting the health, welfare, and safety of the residents of the Commonwealth. We commend Massachusetts' Health Commissioner Monica Bharel's goals to combat health disparities, promote health, and make the best use of our resources in that endeavor.

We are concerned that the rush to develop fracked gas infrastructure (FGI) in our state is in direct conflict with those goals: it increases health disparities, worsens public health and makes poor use of our health care resources by potentially creating public health problems instead of preventing them.

The health concerns surrounding FGI are several. While it is widely recognized that gas extraction via the hydraulic fracturing process causes health problems due to air and water pollution where the drilling is done, many people are not aware that the toxins and carcinogens that travel with the gas when it is extracted from the earth's crust can be emitted when there are releases of gas, unintentional or intentional, anywhere along the pipeline infrastructure.

These substances, acknowledged by Spectra and other gas companies in their reports, include hazardous air pollutants like benzene and formaldehyde, particulate matter, radioactive elements like radon, and heavy metals including mercury, lead and chromium. These toxins pose a health risk as they can potentially cause cancers like leukemia, lung problems like asthma and lung cancer, heart deformities in babies, miscarriages, and neurologic disease.

Natural gas pipelines pose threats to human health and to the environment at every stage of processing and delivery including interstate transmission pipelines, distribution pipelines, storage facilities, metering and regulating stations, compressor stations, and liquefied natural gas facilities. Without comprehensive health impact assessments of the effects of these toxins and carcinogens, it is impossible to know the magnitude of risk that these pollutants pose to human health.

New FGI in our state also threatens public health because it is a driver of climate change, releasing significant amounts of methane, nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide. New interstate pipelines add significant amounts of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere, exacerbating climate change. Climate change is disrupting our state's natural ecosystems and built infrastructure and negatively impacting human health, and is leading to increased rates of infectious diseases and cancer.

FGI also threaten public health and safety due to leaks, water contamination, and explosions; accidents have increased five-fold across the United States between the years 2000 and 2010.

We agree with the American Medical Association that FGI has a potentially significant human health impact and that any expanded or new FGI requires comprehensive health impact assessments to evaluate these health risks.

Also, according to an analysis by our State Attorney General, an expanded FGI is unnecessary and alternatives such as renewable energy and energy efficiency are healthier and less expensive.

While we recognize that our legislators and governor may differ in their views of FGI, they are unanimous in their commitment to promote and protect the public health, welfare and safety of the residents of the Commonwealth. We need safe, reliable and affordable energy for our residents, businesses and municipalities. Our state can and must achieve those goals by investing in renewable energy and energy efficiency rather than in more fossil fuels that warm our planet and create health hazards for all our residents.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

[City/Town] Board of Health