

# PSR FLORIDA

## PHYSICIANS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY®



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19 January 2018

Governor Rick Scott  
Senate President Negrón  
House Speaker Corcoran  
Florida State Capitol  
400 S Monroe St,  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Governor Scott, Senate President Negrón, and House Speaker Corcoran,

We write to share with you a new compilation and analysis of scientific, health, and investigative findings about unconventional oil and gas development, or fracking. We represent health professionals and scientists, both in our chapter in Florida and throughout the country, and we have followed closely the science and emerging data on this issue for many years. A rapidly growing body of evidence, including numerous studies published just in the past year, shows that drilling and fracking, as well as the disposal of fracking waste, threaten drinking water and put public health at risk.

The studies about water contamination included with this letter are a key component of the forthcoming Fifth Edition of the *Compendium of Scientific, Medical, and Media Findings Demonstrating Risks and Harms of Fracking*, the latest in a series of reports that have compiled, tracked, and summarized the evidence pertaining to the harms to health of fracking and associated development. With the Florida State Legislature now considering the issue, we wished to send this section of the forthcoming report ahead of its full publication to help inform your important work.

Cases of drinking water sources contaminated by fracking activities are now proven. Studies have confirmed specific instances of water contamination by various pathways including spills, discharge of fracking waste into rivers and streams, and underground migration of chemicals, including gas, into drinking water wells. Water contamination can also stem from well integrity failures caused by aging cement or the pressures of fracking itself. Nineteen different fracking-related contaminants – including cancer-causing benzene – were recently detected in hundreds of drinking water samples collected from the aquifer overlying the heavily-drilled Barnett Shale in Texas.

Fracking in Florida, where more than 90 percent of residents' drink groundwater, presents many unknowns, and characteristics unique to the state heighten several risks. Florida's porous geology makes it especially vulnerable to groundwater contamination, with aquifers that are highly permeable and highly interconnected. Crumbly, soluble limestone in the vast Floridan Aquifer offers pathways for contaminants

spilled on the surface to travel downward and disperse over great distances. Disposal of fracking waste may also present unique threats in Florida given that liquid waste is injected above, rather than below, oil and gas producing zones, located closer to aquifers (which are poorly mapped) than in most states. Additionally, hurricanes and flooding exacerbate the risks of harm from toxic spills from oil and gas well pads. Flooding from Hurricane Harvey shut down fracking sites in Texas and triggered 31 separate spills at wells, storage tanks and pipelines. Toxic spills from oil and gas well pads exacerbate the risks of harm from extreme storms and flooding. We are concerned that similar or worse outcomes could occur in Florida.

*The Compendium of Scientific, Medical, and Media Findings Demonstrating Risks and Harms of Fracking*, from which the attached document is drawn, compiles the significant and rapidly accumulating body of evidence demonstrating that drilling and fracking pose serious risks of water contamination and harm to public health. We hope that this information is helpful as you address this issue, and we would be glad to discuss it further and answer any questions.

Right now, state agencies have granted exploratory wells in the Panhandle and Southwest Florida that could soon lead to fracking. Although Florida has not permitted an unconventional fracking well, Florida facilitates approving permits like these because of old, dated laws that do not factor in the latest science on the harms of fracking. To protect Florida's drinking water and the health of all residents, we urge you to prohibit these unconventional well stimulation techniques, commonly called fracking, as defined in bills that are currently filed in the legislature.

Sincerely,

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