



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF PENNSYLVANIA

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The League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania
Public Comment to the
Citizens Advisory Committee of the Department of Environmental Protection
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
February 17, 2015

Good morning. I am Roberta Winters speaking on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania. We thank you for the opportunity to come before you today to address several items on your agenda as well as other issues of concern.

The League commends the DEP for its review of flood hazards in denying the first phase of the siting application for Falls Township Hazardous Waste Facility. Such action serves to renew the trust of citizens in the importance of public participation. Further, the League is delighted to hear more about the Recycling Convenience Center Grant Program. As you may know, we have a long history of supporting such programs that promote reuse and recycling.

Addressing the issue of illegal dumping in Pennsylvania is critical. Given the remote nature of many areas of our Commonwealth, clandestine, accidental, and permitted disposals of waste – be they residential, commercial, or industrial – are a growing problem. Recent reports from California of regulators permitting wastewater injection wells into aquifers are alarming.¹ Closer to home, we have had Exxon charged with illegally dumping 50,000 gallons of wastewater at a drilling site in Lycoming County in 2010.² In 2012, a man was sentenced to seven years probation for dumping millions of gallons of wastewater from shale drilling over a several year period in Green County.³ Last year, the Office of the Attorney General criminally charged an environmental service company for illegally dumping wastes. In this instance, radioactive material, comingled with other waste products, leaked on the ground from storage boxes right here in a Harrisburg facility.⁴ We believe this is just the tip of the iceberg. The League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania supports comprehensive rules, meaningful penalties, and

¹ <http://www.desmogblog.com/2015/02/03/california-regulators-allowed-hundreds-oil-industry-wastewater-injection-wells-drilled-aquifers-drinkable-water>

² <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-09-11/exxon-charged-with-illegally-dumping-waste-water-in-pennsylvania>

³ <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303410404577468921667124942>

⁴ <http://www.law360.com/articles/545474/pa-ag-charges-fracking-waste-hauler-for-illegal-dumping>

adequate staffing to prevent and enforce regulations that protect public health and the environment.⁵

Last month the League commented regarding Act 54 and the need for revision based on the evidence of lasting damage to our waters. There is no cure for streams that fail to return because of subsidence from long-wall mining. Prevention, through strong regulation based on the data, is essential. Deep pockets of the fossil fuel industry will never provide adequate compensation for things that are too precious for money to buy. Please use your influence to promote the adequate regulation of long-wall mining in a manner that assures our right to pure water and the preservation of our natural resources.

I have two final points for your consideration. First, as you are aware, there are budget problems in Pennsylvania and agencies, such as the DEP, have been asked to look at cost-saving measures. Best practices might encourage a review of the various advisory committees. An eye toward maximizing public participation while consolidating structures and reducing redundancy may yield dividends. Further, technological advances, - be they drones, pollution sensing applications for phones, remote surveillance equipment, mobile sensors, and the like – need to be considered as a viable way to enhance the oversight of the Department as it seeks to monitor environmental regulations and promote enforcement. Our air, land and water are keys to homeland security.

Finally, there are concerns raised by the recent report from PennEnvironment Research and Policy center entitled *Fracking Failures: Oil and Gas Industry Environmental Violations in Pennsylvania and What They Mean for the U.S.*⁶ This report examined violations in well-construction and waste disposal that allowed toxic chemicals to leak into our air and water. The League would encourage this body to review this document. Further, we would requests that the Department re-examine its classification procedures to clarify consistently what is an “administrative” as opposed to an “environmental health and safety” violation. This kind of data is important as Pennsylvanians look at regulating wastes more effectively and weighing the economic and environmental impacts of natural gas operations.

Thank you for your attention.

⁵ See Position Statement on Marcellus Shale Natural Gas Extraction
<http://www.palwv.org/marcellus-shale/>

⁶ <http://www.environmentamerica.org/reports/amc/fracking-failures-oil-and-gas-industry-environmental-violations-pennsylvania-and-what>