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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Oct 1 2020

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3yr investigation shows Ohio regulators ignore public oil & gas pollution complaints, work closely with polluters

Oct 1 -- A three-year investigation released today by Earthworks and endorsed by 15 Ohio and Pennsylvania groups -- [Loud and Clear: what public regulation complaints reveal about Ohio's oversight of oil and gas pollution and whom it serves](#) -- shows that the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA) and Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) failed to act on 38% of public complaints filed regarding oil and gas air pollution. The investigation also shows the public complaint system is effectively impossible for the public to use.

From 2018-2020, Earthworks' certified thermographers recorded optical gas imaging video of otherwise invisible air pollution -- methane and toxic volatile organic compounds (VOCs) such as benzene -- from oil and gas production in Ohio. Earthworks staff used that evidence to file regulatory complaints with the OEPA and ODNR. Regulators responded to only 70% of our complaints (22 of 31), took no action on another 38%, and have yet to respond on 29% (9 of 31).

Loud and Clear found that Ohio has no requirements for inspectors and other staff to respond to complainants, resulting in complaint replies that came -- after repeated follow up -- only after weeks, months, or in 9 cases, never. In contrast, [OEPA provides oil and gas operators with extensive information about how inspections are conducted and how to prepare for one.](#)

In August, the Trump Administration's Environmental Protection Agency [gutted](#) federal safeguards governing oil and gas production's methane pollution and associated VOCs, meaning little regulatory protection exists for Ohioans from this type of pollution. At the same time, initial steps by OEPA in 2018 to regulate the industry's pollution have stalled.

"Who do Ohio regulators serve? For Ohioans harmed by oil and gas pollution, it's a full time job just to get an answer from the agency whose [mission](#) it is to protect them. For oil and gas operators, regulators take pains to make government oversight as easy as possible. It's becoming clear the only way to reliably protect Ohioans air, water, health and climate from oil and gas pollution is to stop permitting oil and gas production altogether." -- ***Earthworks OH/PA Field Advocate, certified optical gas imaging thermographer, and report co-author Leann Leiter***

"In 2018, a 20-day leak of methane resulting from an explosion of an XTO well pad in the neighboring county of Belmont, Ohio was measurable from space. The Tropospheric Monitoring Instrument detected methane emissions of over 120 metric tons per hour, one of the largest methane leaks ever recorded in the USA. The failure of the Ohio EPA and ODNR to really regulate the oil and gas industry leaves Ohio's residents at risk from toxic air emissions." -- ***Dr. Randi Pokladnik, Harrison County (3rd most fracked county in Ohio) resident***

"The Ohio River is drinking water for 5 million people, including me. Because oil, gas, and petrochemical corporations aren't held accountable for polluting our air and water, my community had to buy a special filter that gets out many of the pollutants. We shouldn't have to pay for that filter, or need one in the first place. Corporations make millions off our resources and leave ordinary folks holding the bag." -- ***Cincinnati resident Mary Aguilera of the Ohio Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival***

"Ohio should be in the business of protecting its people and clean air and water, not aiding the fracking industry by burying accountability under layers of bureaucracy. In many cases there is no platform or process for Ohioians to voice their opinion on proposed oil and gas projects. The people and communities of Ohio deserve to be heard and our government should prioritize our voices over corporate profits." - ***Shelly Corbin, Ohio Campaign Representative for the Sierra Club's Beyond Dirty Fuels Campaign***

"Neither this industry's lack of transparency and accountability, nor the problem of government unresponsiveness, stop at state lines. In Pennsylvania as Ohio, local resident volunteers are too often left to do the work that corporate executives and elected officials join hands in evading. Both our states deserve government that puts the needs of the public ahead of corporations wanting to profit from fracking, or building

a chemical plant.” --**Terrie Baumgardner, Clean Air Council Outreach Coordinator, Beaver County PA**

"Whether in Ohio or Pennsylvania, it's against the law to poison people—unless you have a government permit.” -- **Bob Schmetzer, Chair of Beaver County (PA) Marcellus Awareness Community**

"350Pittsburgh is painfully aware of the effects of oil and gas pollution in Western PA and very concerned about impacts on and from our neighboring communities. This is an issue for everyone who shares air and water with Ohio. We support a halt to the permitting of oil and gas facilities." - **Kate Fissell, 350Pittsburgh**

FOR MORE INFORMATION

[Download Loud and Clear](#)

Visuals associated with sites covered in the report:

- [Compressor station pollution](#)
- [GIF of leaky tank at well site](#)
- [GIF of leaky conventional well in Wayne National Forest](#)
- [Photos of assorted oil & gas infrastructure in Ohio](#)
- [Photos of Optical Gas Imaging thermographers at Ohio sites](#)

Endorsing organizations:

- [Beaver County Marcellus Awareness Community](#)
- [Berks Gas Truth](#)
- [Better Path Coalition](#)
- [Buckeye Environmental Network](#)
- [Center for Coalfield Justice](#)
- [Clean Air Council](#)
- [Concerned Ohio River Residents](#)
- [FreshWater Accountability Project](#)
- [FracTracker Alliance](#)
- The Natural History Museum
- [Ohio Poor People's Campaign](#)
- [Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition](#)
- [Physicians for Social Responsibility PA](#)
- [Sierra Club Ohio](#)
- [350Pittsburgh](#)

Earthworks is dedicated to protecting communities and the environment from the adverse impacts of mineral and energy development while seeking sustainable solutions.