



U.S. AFFILIATE OF INTERNATIONAL PHYSICIANS FOR THE PREVENTION OF NUCLEAR WAR

1111 14th Street NW
Washington, DC 20005
January 28, 2021

President Joe Biden
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

On behalf of tens of thousands of PSR members around the country, I offer my congratulations on your inauguration as the 46th President of the United States. We look forward to working with your administration on our shared values of protecting human life from some of the world's gravest threats, including climate change.

We welcome your recent Executive Order to pause new fossil fuel leasing on federal lands. This decision is critical to addressing climate change and ending the US dependence on fossil fuels, and will also significantly improve public health.

We have just released a report warning that oil and gas extraction and the COVID-19 pandemic are a dangerous combination. The report, *Air Pollution and COVID-19: A Dangerous Combination*, seeks to answer the question, "Does exposure to air pollution from oil and gas extraction and processing increase rates of infection and death from COVID-19?" We examined five counties in Colorado and five in New Mexico, each with significant oil and gas operations, and made the following initial observations:

In Colorado, the number of COVID-19 cases was higher than expected in three counties and lower than expected in two. The number of cases was disproportionately high among people aged 20-29 years and Hispanics. More COVID-19 deaths were observed than expected in Adams, Broomfield, and Weld Counties – counties that experienced high levels of oil and gas development in 2020.

In New Mexico, the number of COVID-19 cases was higher than expected in three counties and lower than expected in two. Disproportionately high levels of cases were observed among people aged 20-49 years and Native Americans. Higher numbers of deaths from COVID-19 than expected were found in one county and lower than expected in four. Adjustment for age and/or

race would likely modify these latter results, but age and race distributions for COVID-19 deaths are not publicly available in New Mexico.

As a result of these topline findings, the report recommends:

- As oil and gas operations add to the cumulative air pollution burden, take all available steps to reduce pollution from these sources.
- Because oil and gas pollutant emissions can be controlled, focus efforts on reducing those emissions, whether from leaks, flaring, blowdowns and other deliberate releases, or other causes.
- Our study was an initial inquiry into impacts of oil and gas pollution on COVID-19 and did not generate definitive answers. Rather, this report constitutes only a first step in that inquiry. Further research is needed.

I attach a copy of the report.

As medical professionals working to protect public health, we urge you to take these findings into account as you determine further actions in regard to public lands. Given what we already know about the adverse impacts on health caused by toxic contaminants released by oil and gas extraction, and now, the possibility that they also increase vulnerability to the deadly COVID-19 virus, we urge you to make the pause on oil and gas leasing on public lands permanent.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Carter', with a large, sweeping initial 'J'.

Jeff Carter
Executive Director