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Beaver County Citizen Groups and Regional Environmental Groups Praise PA DEP for Revoking BCCD's Authority and Call for Suspension of Pipeline Permits

In a [letter](#) to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Secretary Patrick McDonnell, Beaver County citizen groups and regional environmental groups praised the DEP's actions to suspend the Beaver County Conservation District's (BCCD's) authority to review and issue permits because of severe deficiencies noted in the DEP's recent audit of the BCCD.

Citing the DEP audit and action, the groups noted that "pipeline operators are busy at work building pipelines under permits that we now know were issued improperly. The explosion of the Revolution Pipeline on the morning of September 10, 2018 on Ivy Lane in Center Township make clear the stakes of BCCD's improper issuance of permits. The public cannot afford to continue to rely on permits reviewed by BCCD for protection."

"I attended Beaver County Conservation District meetings for more than a year to express concern for public safety and wildlife protection, but the leadership was not transparent and evaded my questions," stated Robert Schmetzer, a member of Beaver County Marcellus Awareness Community and Citizens to Protect the Ambridge Reservoir. "I questioned their

qualifications and expertise to do the job of issuing these permits in the first place. The result is now fear and terror for people living along these pipeline routes.”

As a consequence, the organizations “call on the Department to suspend all active Chapter 102 and 105 permits reviewed by the BCCD for pipelines and other projects that, in the event of accident or failure, pose a risk of catastrophe endangering the public.” Specifically, the letter requests that the DEP:

- Suspend the permits for at least 180 days and until the DEP is able to review and evaluate the adequacy and protectiveness of the permits.
- Produce a public report detailing the results of that review and evaluation.
- Invite the public to comment on the report in a public hearing.
- Invite the Attorney General’s Office to investigate potential criminal violations.

“We are in the Sacrifice Zone for two pipelines within 1,000 feet of our homes. Where is the pipeline oversight in Beaver County to make sure we are safe and another explosion does not occur in our neighborhood?” said Karen Gdula, an Ivy Lane resident.

"Tens of thousands of people get their pristine drinking water from the Ambridge Reservoir," stated Gail Murray, of Communities First Sewickley Valley. "Whether we have ‘acts of God’ or human error, pipelines are not inherently safe and we need DEP to do their job. Water is the new gold and we cannot squander it.”

"I hope Gov. Wolf will shut down all pipeline construction projects and have a major investigation, not only in this county but in other places where conservation districts are issuing permits," stated Rev. James Hamilton, a retired United Methodist pastor in Ambridge, PA. "We’re going to see a lot more people get hurt and lose their water."

“The improper issuance of pipeline construction permits in Beaver County without the proper review is an egregious offense that put residents’ safety and the environment at great risk,” said Joseph Otis Minott, Executive Director & Chief Counsel of Clean Air Council.

“This isn’t the only red flag raised recently by pipeline construction,” said Terrie Baumgardner from the Citizens to Protect the Ambridge Reservoir. “Anyone who’s looked at the Mariner East 2’s history, Shell Pipeline’s safety record, the Center Township explosion, Fracktracker maps of landslide-prone areas, the forecasts for increasing rain in SWPA, or the four recent Falcon pipeline construction spills has a right to ask who’s minding the store for pipelines in SWPA..”

“We need to proceed more carefully when reviewing permits for pipeline construction, because of the growing evidence that industry is not doing a thorough job when constructing pipelines,” said Matthew Mehalik, Executive Director of the Breathe Project. “The DEP must hold pipeline companies accountable to the highest standards for these risky projects and not allow them to be rammed through regulatory review.”

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