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Ahead of Vote, Dozens of Organizations Call on State to Reject Proposed Investments in Controversial Gas Retrofits at State Facility on the Eastern Shore

Retrofits are Premature and Would Increase Use of Fossil Fuels, Hurt Maryland's Push for More Renewable Energy and Create Health and Safety Risks

Citing climate change, environmental, and public health concerns, 32 environmental organizations are calling on the Maryland Board of Public Works to reject a proposal to invest half a million dollars for retrofits at the Eastern Correctional Institution, which would allow the state facility to begin to convert to burning fracked gas. The Eastern Correctional Institution will be an end-user of two pipelines that have not yet been fully permitted, and these investments are premature. The groups' overarching concerns stem from plans to expand fracked gas pipelines on the Eastern Shore as part of a project to switch energy production at two state facilities to fracked gas.

The Eastern Shore Natural Gas Company (ESNG) is seeking approval to build 19 miles of new pipeline that would carry fracked gas from Delaware into Maryland. The seven miles of the "Del-Mar" Pipeline to be built in Maryland would connect with a separate 11-mile pipeline proposed by Chesapeake Utilities.

The Chesapeake Utilities project is designed to provide fracked gas to two state facilities, Eastern Correctional Institution (ECI) and University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES), which would both switch their heating systems from other sources to fracked gas as part of this plan.

The organizations are urging the Board, made up of the governor, state comptroller and treasurer, to halt investments in the project and recommit to renewable energy sources for state institutions.

"Given that Maryland has banned fracking, it defies our state's existing energy policy to bring the same public health risks to our residents by way of pipelines," the letter states. "Moreover, enabling fossil fuel production runs counter to our state's goals of increasing renewable energy production. We are appalled that the request for proposals put out by the State of Maryland to repower the university and prison foreclosed the possibility of clean energy by only requesting applications for fracked gas. We are equally angered that this proposal to repower with dangerous fracked gas is being touted as a 'clean alternative.'"

Click [here](#) for a copy of the letter.

UMES and ECI currently use environmentally harmful sources to heat their facilities (UMES relies on propane and oil and ECI relies on burning wood chips). By converting to fracked gas, however, these facilities are trading one harmful source for another.

The Board of Public Works is expected to consider two contracts totaling \$514,250 for planning and engineering of the ECI power plant conversion at its July 1st meeting.

"With clean, renewable energy affordable and abundant right now, it makes no sense for the state to commit to burning dangerous fracked gas at ECI's power plant," said Susan Olsen, Chair of the Sierra

Club's Lower Eastern Shore Group. "[Marylanders overwhelmingly prefer investing in clean energy solutions instead of committing to decades of dependence on fracked gas.](#) At a time when Maryland is considering major budget cuts, we should not waste money on climate-disrupting fossil fuel projects."

The construction and operation of the Del-Mar Pipeline would impact 1,239 square feet of streams and over 16,000 square feet of wetlands in Maryland. ESNB plans to install its pipeline through at least one older, forested wetland that is vulnerable to construction-related impacts using the destructive "open trench" method of construction. While the specifics of the 11-mile Chesapeake Utilities pipeline are not yet known, similar impacts to our regional water resources are likely.

As a kid growing up on the Eastern Shore, I knew there was nothing you could ever offer me that would get me to allow you to poison my marsh," said Dan O'Hare, President of Wicomico Environmental Trust. "We know pipelines leak. And when they do, they will make our community sick. We will suffer. We know fracked gas is one of the main culprits in causing the waters to rise and destroy our coasts. What value could there possibly be to us to allow this remnant of the dying industrial era to endanger our wetlands, our water, and the health of our community?"

"As someone with a background in environmental studies and marine science, I do not support UMES's decision to utilize fracked gas as a means to heat the facilities when alternatives were not properly considered," said Madeline Farmer, a graduate student at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. "The decision to support a fracked-gas pipeline is inconsistent with UMES's reputation as one of the most eco-friendly Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the country. As one of the greenest HBCUs, it's important that we continue to lead the green movement and set an example for other universities across the State of Maryland and the nation."

The Eastern Shore of Maryland has been called "ground zero" for sea level rise due to climate change. It makes no sense to invest in pipelines that will lock the state into decades of reliance on fossil fuels that contribute to climate change.

In addition to violating the spirit of Maryland's renewable energy commitments and fracking ban, the pipelines would also endanger public health.

"We are concerned that we are being asked to put our environment and public health at risk for a pipeline that we may not have use for in the near future as our state and the country moves towards clean energy," the letter states.

The following organizations have signed on to the letter sent to the Board of Public Works:

Chesapeake Climate Action Network
Waterkeepers Chesapeake
Greenbelt Climate Action Network
Manokin River Keepers
Maryland Legislative Coalition
Parkertown Car Care
Maryland Chapter, Lower Eastern Shore Sierra Club
Sierra Club, Maryland Chapter
Earthworks
Talbot County Hunger Coalition

Lower Shore Progressive Caucus
Audubon Maryland-DC
Queen Anne's Conservation Association
Ridge to Reefs
Talbot Preservation Alliance
Assateague Coastal Trust
Organization of Environmental States
Wicomico Environmental Trust
ShoreRivers
Howard County Climate Action
Calvert Citizens for a Healthy Community
Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee
Baltimore Phil Berrigan Memorial Chapter Veterans For Peace
Clean Air Prince Georges
Wicomico Interfaith Alliance
Wicomico County Creekwatchers
Environmental Justice Ministry Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church
Indivisible Howard County
Harford County Climate Action
The Climate Mobilization, Montgomery County
League of Women Voters of Maryland
Cecil Solidarity