



GREATER BOSTON PHYSICIANS  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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CARING FOR OUR CLIMATE  
PREVENTING NUCLEAR WAR

October 7, 2019

John Keenan, Chair  
Senate Committee on Post Audit and Oversight  
24 Beacon Street, Room 413-F  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Mr. Keenan,

Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) is an advocacy organization of more than 50,000 health professionals and co-recipient of the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize.

The Greater Boston chapter of PSR has published three reports outlining the grave health, safety and emergency response hazards of a 'natural' gas compressor station that Spectra Energy proposes to build in Weymouth, Massachusetts<sup>1</sup>. These reports identify numerous flaws, gaps and errors in the regulatory and review process that has been carried out by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH).

In May 2019, we also filed a complaint with the State Ethics Commission stating our concern that Matthew Beaton, former Secretary of the Department of Energy and Environment, had violated the Conflict of Interest Law for State Employees of Massachusetts (G.L. c. 268A) with relation to this project (attached here).

With this letter, we ask the Senate Committee on Post Audit and Oversight to open formal legislative hearings into:

1. The flawed regulatory process that resulted in the air quality permit for this project.
  - These flaws include but are not limited to: the DPH's failure to consider existing air pollution levels and population vulnerabilities in the health impact assessment; the DEP's suppression of air quality data performed at the Rhode Island Department of Public Health's (RIDOH) air lab; and the DEP's acceptance of Spectra Energy's mischaracterization of the arsenic-contaminated soil as 'historic fill,' resulting in a failure to appropriately consider potential residential exposures to soil and groundwater contaminants in the health impact assessment.
2. Why the DEP overturned the state's own regulatory precedent in providing an air quality permit for the proposed project.
  - In September 1990, the Commonwealth rejected a permit by Clean Harbors of Braintree to place a rotary kiln incinerator – a less polluting facility than a natural gas compressor station – at the same site due to human health concerns.
3. The detrimental impact that the proposed compressor station will have on the Commonwealth's ability to meet its greenhouse gas reduction mandates under the Global Warming Solutions Act.

<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://gbpsr.org/issues/health-and-environment/weymouth-compressor-station/>

We ask you to require the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection to:

1. Overhaul its air quality permitting process to require independent external experts to perform air dispersion modeling and to ensure that models accurately reflect the meteorological conditions and geographic characteristics of a proposed site.
2. Solicit independent external reviews of the abatement plan put forward by Spectra Energy for the Weymouth site (release tracking number 4-26230).

We ask you to require the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to:

1. Conduct comprehensive health impact assessments with transparency and scientific rigor. Such assessments should quantitatively assess the potential cumulative and interactive effects of multiple environmental exposures and should incorporate existing population vulnerabilities.
2. Request assistance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to conduct an epidemiologic investigation of the disproportionately elevated disease rates (leukemia, asthma, heart disease, COPD and nasopharyngeal and bronchogenic tumors) in the Fore River Basin and their potential relationship to existing environmental exposures.

As physicians, we consider it our professional responsibility to advocate for the public health and safety of residents of the Commonwealth, and we urge your prompt attention to this matter.



Matt Bivens, MD  
GBPSR Board Chair

Cc: Paul Feeney, Vice Chair  
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