



Greater Boston PSR Spring 2021 Newsletter

Announcing our updated website!

We are excited to announce GBPSR's updated website! <https://gbpsr.org/>
We would like to thank the many Greater Boston PSR members involved in this major undertaking, with a special thanks to Sydney Engel, Ira Helfand, Martha Ellen Katz, Austin Wertheimer, Richard Clapp, Caren Solomon, our Program Manager for Climate and Health, Andee Krasner and Executive Director, Anna Baker for their many contributions — designing web pages, editing, and keeping our message focused. We are especially grateful for the dedication and hard work of National PSR website designer Julia Morgan and to local website designer Diane Fassino, who donated her talents and skill to this endeavor.



Please check out the new pages for [Nuclear Weapons](#) and [Climate](#); dedicated areas for our [nuclear](#) and [climate reports](#); and special new sections on Greater Boston PSR [History](#) and [Fossil Fuels](#).

If you have any comments on the website, or would like to become more involved in our activities this year, we welcome your ideas and your participation. We will be adding action alerts to these pages, as well as invitations to join us for specific programming as these projects evolve. Our three project areas for 2021 include:

- A new CME Nuclear Weapons module, which we are developing in collaboration with the Massachusetts Medical Society;
- A planned fall webinar on nuclear arms and climate change, with a focus on air pollution;
- Continued active advocacy around our Back from the Brink initiative and on the health risks of the vast expansions in new fossil fuel infrastructure underway in Massachusetts.

We have big ideas and big goals — and we welcome your help. If you are interested in joining our efforts, lending your skills and interests to our work, or attending our monthly meetings on the first Monday of each month at 7pm, please let Anna Baker know (abaker@gbpsr.org) and she will send you an invitation.

We look forward to hearing from all of you as we continue to expand our programming and our reach in 2021.

Brita Lundberg, MD
Chair of the Board

Updates: New Webinar and Curriculum in the works

GBPSR is working on a new CME curriculum around nuclear weapons in collaboration with the Massachusetts Medical Society Committee on Environmental and Occupational Health. We are also spearheading a webinar series on nuclear war and climate change. For more information or if you are interested in getting involved in either of those endeavors, please contact GBPSR Executive Director Anna Baker at abaker@gbpsr.org or 617-868-3003.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ADVOCACY! Win on [Palmer biomass in Springfield](#)

Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) said in a letter to Palmer Renewable Energy (PRE) that it was revoking the Final Plan Approval necessary for the construction of a 42-mW biomass electricity generating plant proposed in East Springfield.

The Springfield Climate Justice Coalition (SCJC), representing environmental and social justice organizations throughout the city and the region, has vigorously opposed the plant because of its threat to human health and the environment. The plant would have emitted 200 tons per year of particulate matter and other pollutants into the air of a diverse low-income environmental justice community, worsening asthma rates and severity in a city where one in five children suffer the disease. Opponents also cited the negative impact on climate change: the carbon released by the plant would have been worse per unit of electricity produced than a coal-fired generator.

GBPSR Files Brief with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) highlighting the health risks of the Weymouth Compressor station — [GBPSR FERC brief](#)

On April 2nd, Greater Boston PSR, along with the Conservation Law Foundation, Sierra Club, Mothers Out Front, Climate Code Blue and many others filed a brief with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) underscoring the serious health risks of the Weymouth compressor station.

Miriam Wasser of WBUR asked GBPSR to explain what is at stake here. Board Chair Dr. Brita Lundberg replied:

What is at stake?

1. The health of many communities in the Commonwealth, including those living in Boston and Dorchester, which lie in the 10 mile “airshed” of Weymouth;
2. The potential to reverse a very bad precedent of locating heavy industrial infrastructure in environmental justice communities;
3. An opportunity to acknowledge that this compressor station is not needed and poses unacceptable climate and safety risks.

“Why intervene now?” Ms Wasser asked.

Dr. Lundberg: “There is still the opportunity to do the right thing.”

“Greater Boston PSR is choosing to intervene because FERC specifically asked about what safety and environmental justice issues we know about now that we did not know about when the project was approved.

I am hoping that this is the start of the turning of the tide on the flood of natural gas expansions in our state that generally occur in the shadow of the most vulnerable communities already battling health issues related to legacy pollutants that they have been saddled with. I find it a very hopeful sign that FERC is now offering to listen and that they are asking the right questions.

Since this community has lost so many times on so many fronts, I pitch my expectations low. They have, so far, never been in the room when decisions are made, with the result that this community finds itself on the menu; and they are being asked to pay the bill — with their health.

You ask why all the natural gas companies are jumping into the fray: of course all of these companies have piled on. That is not a surprise. What is a surprise is that FERC has granted an opening.

And what I encourage you to cover is WHY FERC is granting this—i.e. that perhaps they have finally realized how manifestly unjust it is to locate an infrastructure that will be the top polluter in the area in a community that *already* suffers from cancers of the lung and bronchus, cancers that correlate closely with air pollution, in two environmental justice tracts close to Weymouth at *a level 39% above the rest of the state*. Instead of addressing that health issue and limiting air pollution there — benzene levels are already 400% above state regulatory levels in some areas (and why is that?)-- we are adding more air pollution to the mix.

Not only that, but the communities within 1.5 miles of the compressor also are in the top ranking in the state for the following: Hodgkins lymphoma. Non-Hodgkins lymphoma. Nasopharyngeal and oral cancers. COPD and asthma require ER visits and hospitalizations. Heart attacks. What do all of those have in common? They are triggered by VOCs, air pollution and industrial toxins. This community also is in the top ranking for lowest median income in the state, and highest number of residents over 65 and under 5— a vulnerable population.

The other very concerning fact—that I wonder if FERC has just tumbled to, since they issued a requirement a few months ago that the pressure in the pipeline there be dropped *by half*—is that the PIR, or "death zone" of an anticipated explosion, is 726 feet. The closest house is 700 feet. That means--they allowed construction of a facility where the nearest house is within the expected explosion radius. Moreover, the PIR often does not predict the explosion radius at all. The “death zone” is often two fold higher than the PIR-- which in the case of Weymouth means that a lot more houses lie within the PIR--and a lot more lives will be lost in the event of an explosion.

I think that if Massachusetts residents were aware of what their state signed on to, especially in light of the racial justice and equity movements of the last 9 months, they would be appalled. I am.”

Read the full story [here on WBUR](#).



The health community has historically played a critical role in alerting the public to the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons, and support for Back from the Brink would be a powerful statement grounded in that tradition. The campaign is looking to add academic institutions and medical societies to this endorsement list and welcome students and faculty to encourage their institutions to sign on. Contact Anna Baker if your Massachusetts’ based institution may be interested via abaker@gbpsr.org.

Back from the Brink urges the United States to fundamentally change U.S. nuclear weapons policy to lead us away from the dangerous path we are on and to abolish them from the planet.

To read more about the Back from the Brink platform:

<https://preventnuclearwar.org/>