

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES  
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WASHINGTON, DC 20515

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June 6, 2010

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The Honorable Lisa Jackson  
Administrator  
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)  
Ariel Rios Building  
1200 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20460-0001

Dear Administrator Jackson,

Last week, Pennsylvania experienced a serious accident in a natural gas drilling operation in the Marcellus Shale. A ruptured mine spewed explosive gas and contaminated wastewater into the environment for 16 hours before being brought under control. The accident appears to have been caused by a failed blowout preventer — an alarming similarity to the tragedy of the Deepwater Horizon rig. According to the Secretary John Hanger of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, this accident could have been even worse, and could have resulted in a “catastrophic incident that endangered life and property.”

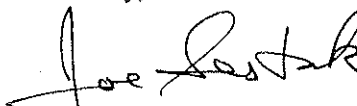
This accident highlights the significant dangers of these drilling operations, which are expanding in Pennsylvania at an unprecedented rate and scale. Proper regulations are not in place to manage them and protect the public. American Rivers has declared the Upper Delaware River the most endangered in the country due to natural gas extraction activities in the Marcellus Shale, and the state DEP has recently had its budget cut by more than 25 percent.

In April, my colleague Senator Bob Casey wrote to you requesting greater EPA involvement in Pennsylvania to protect its citizens from the detrimental effects of hydraulic fracturing. This accident underscores the need, and urgency, for the EPA to take action.

Recent events, from the tragic oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico to the fraudulent activity that contributed to the collapse on Wall Street, have reminded us all that we cannot depend on industry to police itself when our quality of life, present and future, is at stake. It is critical that the EPA play a role in assessing and minimizing industrial risk so that our citizens do not sacrifice their health, safety, livelihoods, and environment to irresponsible development of our nation’s vast natural wealth.

I will continue to work with Senator Casey to provide even greater authority to the EPA in oversight of hydraulic fracturing operations through passage of the FRAC Act. As that legislation moves through the legislative process, I request that the EPA use its current authority to the maximum extent possible to protect the health, safety, and environment of Pennsylvania and our neighboring states.

Sincerely,

  
Joe Sestak  
Member of Congress