

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette®

What do we value more: health or money?

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The PG's editorial board got itself all twisted in a knot in "The Dimock Effect: Cabot's Loss in Court Warns the Drilling Industry" (March 13) by trying to have things both ways. Yes, unconventional natural gas development has made some money for Pennsylvania, but at what cost? The Dimock case confirmed that ground water sources for drinking and bathing can be contaminated during natural gas development.

While enormous volumes of water are being taken fresh and returned polluted from this heavy industrial process, the air is becoming more polluted from diesel fumes caused by the teeming truck traffic, numerous well-site generators and gigantic natural-gas compressors — all rapidly encroaching upon neighborhoods where our children live, learn and play.

While less carbon dioxide is produced by burning natural gas compared with other carbon sources, the greenhouse gas "savings" are minimal to nonexistent for two reasons: Methane (a potent greenhouse gas) is vented, flared or inadvertently leaked throughout the process, and huge volumes of fossil fuels must be used in order to drill, frack, collect, transport and process natural gas.

Most citizens dislike air pollution, water pollution and climate change because of one very simple reason: They cause people (friends, family, neighbors, perfect strangers) to get sick. We can't expect to be healthy if we have to breathe polluted air and bathe in and drink polluted water; we can't prevent the adverse health effects of a warming planet if we insist on continuing to burn fossil fuels.

Make some money producing natural gas or have healthy humans — that's the real choice. You can't have it both ways. (It's never been done before, anywhere; we shouldn't experiment in Pennsylvania.) The imperative to human health has never been clearer: Keep the carbon in the ground.

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