

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE MAY 15, 2014

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## ***HEI Special Committee to Develop a Scientific Research Plan on Potential Impacts of Unconventional Oil and Gas Development***

(BOSTON, MA) In response to a growing need to improve the understanding of potential impacts of recent increases in gas and oil development, the Health Effects Institute (HEI)<sup>1</sup> has convened a special committee of experts to develop a strategic plan to guide future research on the potential health and environmental impacts of unconventional oil and gas development in the Appalachian Basin. This initiative, supported by a number of foundations<sup>2</sup> in the region, aims to produce a summary appraisal of what we know today by late 2014, and a strategic plan to answer key questions by the middle of 2015.

With the expansion of shale gas development in the Appalachian region and across the nation has come controversy over possible effects on people and the environment. In response to concerns about natural gas and oil extraction in the region, 26 leaders from government, industry, academia, environmental groups, and civil society established the Pennsylvania-based Shale Gas Roundtable (<http://iop.pitt.edu/shalegas/>). In 2013, this group emphasized the need for “efforts to increase balanced research and rigorous monitoring of the possible impacts of unconventional oil and gas development” and sought HEI’s advice, identifying it as “uniquely well suited” to engage in the shale oil and gas area. In agreeing to pursue this important area, HEI Board Chair Richard Celeste noted that “the HEI model of providing independent, high-quality research in controversial circumstances is ideal for work in the complex and challenging arena of shale oil and gas extraction.”

HEI has established this independent special committee to (1) explore and define the potential human health, ecologic, environmental, and social impacts of unconventional oil and gas development in the Appalachian Basin, and (2) develop a broad strategic scientific research plan to understand such impacts in both a regional and a national context. Throughout the process, the committee, with the assistance of the Institute of Politics at the University of Pittsburgh, will consult with a wide variety of experts and government officials, as well as with industry, community, and environmental groups, to ensure that it considers the full range of issues and questions.

The committee is chaired by George M. Hornberger, Distinguished Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering and of Earth and Environmental Science at Vanderbilt University and director of the

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<sup>1</sup> The Health Effects Institute ([www.healtheffects.org](http://www.healtheffects.org)) is an independent, non-profit research institute funded jointly by government and industry to provide credible, high quality science on air pollution and health for air quality decisions. HEI sponsors do not participate in the selection, oversight or review of HEI science, and HEI’s reports do not necessarily represent their views.

<sup>2</sup> Henry L. Hillman Foundation, Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, Richard King Mellon Foundation, and other private foundations in Pennsylvania and West Virginia

Vanderbilt Institute for Energy and the Environment. The committee members are drawn from leading institutions in the Appalachian Basin and around the nation and are highly regarded experts in diverse fields of study directly related to unconventional oil and gas development and its possible impacts. Committee members are expert in geophysics, hydrology, geology, medicine, epidemiology, toxicology, cumulative risk assessment, quantitative uncertainty analysis, aquatic ecology, terrestrial ecology, atmospheric modeling, human exposure assessment, engineering, environmental monitoring, and groundwater and surface water quality assessment. Special advisors and consultants will contribute additional areas of expertise, including economics and petroleum engineering.

The committee's work will begin with a review of the existing scientific literature and the preparation, in late 2014, of an initial "summary appraisal," an early assessment to identify areas that emerge as warranting additional investigation. The Committee will draw on the public response to the appraisal, previous efforts to define needs for the study of unconventional oil and gas development, comments from other experts, and its own independent work, to create a draft comprehensive strategic research plan. The plan will undergo public review and HEI peer review in 2015, before a final *Strategic Research Plan for Understanding the Potential Impacts of Unconventional Oil and Gas Development* is published later in 2015. HEI will share and discuss the plan with the policy and stakeholder communities at the state, regional, and national levels.

The Strategic Plan will be an independent, priority-based assessment of scientific questions and gaps in knowledge that will lay the groundwork for targeted analysis, communication of key results, and better informed decision making. The Plan is designed to be a high quality and widely credible guide to be used by research funders and the scientific community to inform priority-based funding decisions, and also by regulators, oil and gas developers, environmentalists, public health experts, and other stakeholders to inform shaping policy in this important arena.

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### HEI Special Committee on Unconventional Oil and Gas Development

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George M. Hornberger (chair), *Vanderbilt University*

Alison C. Cullen, *University of Washington*

Jeffrey J. Daniels, *Ohio State University*

Alan M. Ducatman, *West Virginia University*

John K. Jackson, *Stroud Water Research Institute*

William (Bill) M. Kappel, *United States Geological Survey (Emeritus)*

Vince Matthews, *Principal of Leadville Geology; former State Geologist of Colorado*

Allen L. Robinson, *HEI Research Committee and Carnegie Mellon University*

Dale P. Sandler, *National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences*

Susan L. Stout, *Federal Liaison, United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service*

Deborah L. Swackhamer, *University of Minnesota*

Raymond S. H. Yang, *Colorado State University*

Junfeng (Jim) Zhang, *Duke University*

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