

Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania  
Pennsylvania League of Women Voters  
Department of Environmental and Energy Engineering  
at Duquesne University  
presents

# SHALE GAS AND PUBLIC HEALTH CONFERENCE

FEBRUARY 27, 2025  
FULL DAY CONFERENCE

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY  
In Person and Online



## Speaker Bios



### **Daniel Bain, PhD**

Dr. Daniel Bain's research program focuses on the comprehensive assessment of human driven changes in environmental systems. Hydrology, geomorphology, biogeochemistry, ecology, and spatial analysis are combined to focus on fundamental landscape components, particularly fluvial (stream) and urban systems, over the last several centuries. These inquiries are supported by state-of-the-art laboratory facilities for the examination of sediment and water chemistry. They are also strongly rooted in the measurement of the environment in the field and collection of historical data from archives. Dr. Bain routinely pursues opportunities to work and lead in larger synthesis efforts, allowing rich interactions with a broad community.



### **Jennifer Baka**

Jennifer Baka is an Associate Professor of Geography and an Associate at the Earth and Environmental Systems Institute at Penn State. She conducts interdisciplinary research on how energy systems impact human-environment relationships and environmental governance. Since 2020, she has been a Member of the Environmental Justice Advisory Board for the PA Department of Environmental Protection.



### **Lois Bower-Bjornson**

Lois Bower-Bjornson is the Southwestern Pennsylvania field organizer with Clean air Council and the host of frackland tours. Frackland tours were implemented to give people a first hand account of what it is like to live and grow up in the shale fields of Southwestern Pennsylvania. Lois is a board member with Center For Coalfield Justice and a consultant with the MAD FACTS organization.

Lois lives and grew up in the most heavily fracked county in Pennsylvania Washington County. Lois is the mother of three boys and a girl. Along with Lois her four children have advocated for their health and the right to live in a healthy world. She advocates for all communities impacted by oil and gas activity. Lois collects stories of impacted residents. She shares their health impacts from the oil and gas industry. Lois has hosted numerous state, and federal elected officials, along with national and international reporters, and documentary filmmakers on a tour. She has hosted and collaborated with various researchers such as Penn State and Towson where her tour is part of the curriculum.

Lois has testified in Harrisburg and Washington D.C. to advocate for her family and all Pennsylvanian's right to breathe clean air, have safe water, and live in a safe, healthy community for a better future for everyone.



### **Patty DeMarco, PhD**

Patricia M. DeMarco is a Pittsburgh author with a doctorate in Biology from the University of Pittsburgh. She has spent a fifty-year career in energy and environmental policy in both private and public sector positions. She now writes and lectures in the fields of sustainability, energy and environmental policy, and natural history.

Served on Forest Hills Borough Council Member 2016-2020 and Vice President 2020 to 2023 and on Pennsylvania Municipal League- Board of Directors 2021-2024.

Serves on CONNECT (Congress of Neighboring Communities) President 2021-2022 Chair, Research Policy Council 2024 to Present

Holds an appointment as Senior Scholar, Chatham University, and Adjunct Faculty 2012 to present. Serves on the Board of Trustees, Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens 2019 to Present; Secretary of the Board of Trustees 2022-2023, Vice President 2024-2026.



**Bob Donnan**

Active on drilling issues since 2009, when the industry was dumping fracking waste into the Monongahela River, our drinking water source. Purchased a \$1,500 long lens camera to record tri-state industry activities. Aerial shale gas photography began in 2010 with volunteer pilot Steve White, resulting in 57 flights and thousands of photos.

Attended shale gas meetings and court cases in 6 counties, recording hundreds of videos and posted reports. Conducted onsite DEP file reviews. Submitted written and verbal comments at Washington County commissioners' meetings, and Peters Township council and school board meetings.

Actions initiated by family heirs resulted in my leased gas rights, without ever personally initiating any drilling activity. Some proceeds were used for flights, travel, media expenses and furtherment of environmental causes.

Vietnam veteran and Founder of the 700-member 15th Artillery (reunion) Association. Awarded the 'Honorable Order of Saint Barbara' medal, and the 'Beyond the Call of Duty' award for humanitarian work gathering medical supplies for Vietnamese clinics. Co-Founder of the Pittsburgh chapter of Veterans for Peace. Chairman of VFW764 'Wall of Valor' committee. Climate Reality Leader.

Graduate of Penn State's 'Ornamental Nursery Industry' horticulture program; retired landscape contractor. Home has rooftop solar, backup battery, and an electric vehicle.



**James P. Fabisiak, PhD**

Dr. James Fabisiak received his PhD in Pharmacology at the Pennsylvania State University School of Medicine at the Milton S. Hershey Medical Center. He went on to post-doctoral training at the University of Vermont and was the recipient of a Parker B. Francis Fellowship in Pulmonary Biology and Respiratory Medicine. He is currently an Associate Professor of Environmental & Occupational Health as well as current Director of the Center for Healthy Environments and Communities (CHEC) at University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health. CHEC's mission is to apply a data-and fact-based approach to understand environmental health issues of importance to Southwestern PA. He originally considers himself a mechanistic toxicologist studying the cellular and molecular responses of injury, inflammation, repair and pathologic remodeling in the lung following environmental insult. He has received funding from the NIH, EPA, HUD and other sources and contributed to over 50 peer-reviewed publications. More recently he has "expanded his portfolio" to include more public health community-based activities such as studying public health risks associated with air pollution, unconventional natural gas drilling and marine oil spills. Dr. Fabisiak has served as a Co-investigator on the recently completed PA-DOH funded epidemiological studies on environmental factors, including unconventional natural gas activity, and health in Southwest PA.



**Gillian Graber**

Gillian Graber is the Executive Director and co-founder of Protect PT (Penn-Trafford). As a mother of two, Gillian is passionate about keeping children and her community safe from the impacts of fracking. After an experience dealing with air pollution issues in her own home, she has first-hand knowledge of the health impacts that pollution can have on a family and how government agencies often ignore residents in distress. She equips residents with the tools to feel empowered to fight against the fossil fuel industry.



### **Ron Gulla**

Mr. Ron Gulla had the second Marcellus Shale well drilled on his property in Hickory, PA, in 2005. He had a successful career working for Hughes Tool Company and later Anderson Equipment, selling drill bits and other equipment to oil and gas well operators and looked forward to developing his new farm. He spent several years working on well pads in addition to experiencing first hand unconventional drilling on his farm. The lease was for \$7.50 an acre with a promise of free gas, which never materialized. He lost his prized fishing pond, the well water turned yellow, his horse foundered, and the devastation to the land left his farm unworkable. He has spent the last 20 years speaking about his experiences at public forums and testifying at government hearings, and finding others across the country with similar stories. His story has been featured in many media outlets both domestic and international, searchable on the internet. He has worked for Damascus Citizens and was recognized with a Community Sentinel Award from the FracTracker Alliance in 2019. He now resides on his farm in Iowa, where he continues his advocacy, networking tirelessly to connect the harmed.



### **Steven G. Jansto, PhD**

Steven has extensive technical, operational, process and physical metallurgy experience in steelmaking and new product development. Steven has held positions in major steel operations responsible for

operational and technical success as well as accountability for the financial performance of various operational divisions. Steven's extensive global experience in operations, metallurgical research and market and cost analysis positions him to integrate and implement both physical and process metallurgy into steelmaking to develop and commercialize new products and improved processes. Steven continues to work closely with customers, universities, consortiums and research institutes throughout the world, assisting them to achieve their research, quality, production and new product development objectives. Most recent activities involve materials engineering design considerations for carbon sequestration, green iron and steelmaking process metallurgy development and hydrogen infrastructure considerations.



#### **Eric Lebel, PhD**

Dr. Eric Lebel is a Senior Scientist at PSE Healthy Energy ([www.psehealthyenergy.org](http://www.psehealthyenergy.org)), where he started in 2021 after he graduated from Stanford University with a PhD in Environmental Earth System Science. His research focuses on emissions of methane and health-damaging air pollutants; specifically, he focuses on abandoned oil and gas wells and residential appliances. He has worked to develop new methods for quantifying these emissions and has designed and executed research campaigns to systematically quantify emissions of methane and other pollutants. Dr. Lebel continues to lead work studying emissions of methane and air pollutants and their impact on climate and public health.



#### **Justin Mackey, PhD**

Justin Mackey is a PhD candidate in the Department of Geology and Environmental Science at the University of Pittsburgh. With over a decade of experience in studying the geochemistry of the Appalachian basin, Justin's research centers on the benefaction and remediation of fossil energy waste. His current work applies datamining and numerical simulations to characterize radium trends and NORM waste estimates from waste-water sourced from the Marcellus shale.



**Matthew Mehalik, PhD**

Matthew Mehalik serves as Executive Director of the Breathe Project, a coalition of local residents, environmental advocates, public health professionals and academics advocating for healthier air for the Pittsburgh region. From 2007 – 2016, he served as Program Director, Sustainable Pittsburgh. Matt teaches environmental policy and community resiliency courses at both Heinz College and the School of Social and Decision Sciences at Carnegie Mellon University since 2008. He has written multiple peer-reviewed publications in sustainability, design, and education and has co-authored Ethical and Environmental Challenges to Engineering with Michael E. Gorman and Patricia Werhane. Matt's Ph.D. is in Systems Engineering from the University of Virginia. He serves as the chair of the board of trustees of Phipps Conservatory in Pittsburgh.



**Justin Nobel**

Justin Nobel writes on science and environment for US magazines, investigative sites, and literary journals. He has been published in Best American Science and Nature Writing and Best American Travel Writing. A book he co-wrote with a death row exoneree, The Story of Dan Bright, was published in 2016 by University of New Orleans Press. His 2020 Rolling Stone magazine story, "America's Radioactive Secret," won an award from the National Association of Science Writers and inspired his latest book, "Petroleum-238: Big Oil's Dangerous Secret and the Grassroots Fight to Stop It." Justin's writing has helped lead to lawsuits, public dialogue, academic research and been taught at Harvard's School of Public Health.



**Rachel Pecharka**

In her role as Program Associate for Solar United Neighbors of Pennsylvania, Rachel has worked on renewable energy policies, community organizing efforts, and education campaigns throughout the state with the aim to increase equitable public access and support for solar energy.



**Cyndhia Ramatchandirane, MS**

Cyndhia Ramatchandirane joined Earthjustice in 2020 and is based in New Orleans, Louisiana. As Staff Scientist on the Fossil Fuels team, Cyndhia supports litigation efforts to protect the frontline communities impacted by the oil, gas, and petrochemical industry along the Louisiana/Texas Gulf coast and in the Ohio River Valley. Cyndhia investigates the potential pollution impacts on climate, the environment, and public health from proposed fossil fuel infrastructure projects. She also collaborates with other scientists and local environmental and community groups to address climate and environmental justice issues that these projects would aggravate.



**Pouné Saberi, MD, MPH**

Specializing in Occupational and Environmental Medicine (OEM), Dr. Pouné Saberi, MD, MPH, is a mid-career medical doctor who lives and works in Philadelphia, PA, USA. She is responsible for planning and delivering population-based employee and environmental health services at the Veteran Administration (VA) Medical Center in Philadelphia, PA as well as clinical consultation to eight other facilities in the VA network. She teaches OEM to residents in a non-traditional immersion residency program and a climate and health course at Cooper Medical School of Rowan University in New Jersey which addresses community adaptation and mitigation as well as resilience within the healthcare system. She received her medical degree and Master of Public Health at Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston, MA. She has served as past president of Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) National, and continues to be a board member for the Pennsylvania chapter.



**Alison Steele, MBA**

Alison L. Steele earned her undergraduate degree in physics from Drew University in Madison, NJ and her MBA in Sustainable Business Practices from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, PA. As part of her graduate work, Alison studied sustainability tools and practices used by leading companies in Europe, performed consulting services for large Pittsburgh-area companies, and published research on organizational behavior techniques used to aid adoption of sustainability initiatives. Prior to starting at the Environmental Health Project, she led policy and education efforts at Conservation Consultants, Inc. and developed the company's flagship grassroots community engagement program, which focused on advancing home health and energy efficiency in low-income Pittsburgh neighborhoods. She joined EHP at the beginning of 2020, and since then, she and her team have been taking advantage of our increasingly virtual world to extend their reach as they work to defend public health in the face of oil and gas development.



**John Stolz, PhD**

John Stolz is a Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences and Interim Chair of the Department of Environmental and Energy Engineering at Duquesne University. He has a BS degree in biology from Fordham University and a PhD from Boston University in microbial ecology and evolution. He was an NRC Postdoctoral fellow at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory and the Department of Geology and Planetary Sciences, California Institute of Technology, and an NSF Postdoctoral Fellowship in Plant Biology in the Biochemistry Department at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. His main research interests are in the community structure of microbial mats and stromatolites; the microbial metabolism of metals and metalloids including arsenic, selenium, and nitrate; and water quality impacts of unconventional shale gas extraction. He is a AAAS Fellow and recipient of the Dewey Award from Clean Water Action. Dr. Stolz has published 105 journal articles, 48 book chapters, and author-edited three books including “Environmental Impacts from the Development of Unconventional Oil and Gas Reserves” with Cambridge University Press



**Tonyehn Verkitus**

Tonyehn Verkitus is the Executive Director of Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania and the Northeast Counties Medical Society. She is also the host of WVIA’s Keystone Edition Health and Executive Producer/Host of the Life and... podcast. Tonyehn is the chair of Africa Community Exchange, a nonprofit organization started by her family whose mission is to support an effective model of education for youth and educators in Liberia. Tonyehn also sits on the boards of the Lackawanna County Arts, Culture and Education Department; WVIA Community Advisory Board; Clean Water Action and NEPA Health Care Foundation where she is the Grants Committee chair.



**Amy Widestrom, PhD**

Amy Widestrom is the Executive Director of the League of Women Voters of PA. She holds a BA in English and Theater from Oberlin College and an MA and PhD in Political Science from Syracuse University. She has been the recipient of several awards, including the American Political Science Association's Clarence Stone Scholar Award, a Brookings Institution Research Fellowship, and an American Political Association Congressional Fellowship, when she worked for the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs. Before joining the League, Amy was a faculty member at Arcadia University and Chair of the Department of Historical and Political Studies.



**Mary Willis, PhD, MPH**

Mary D. Willis, Ph.D., M.P.H., is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Epidemiology at the Boston University School of Public Health. Her expertise lies at the intersection of environmental epidemiology, spatial exposure assessment, and applied data science. Much of her work also leverages econometric-based causal inference methods. She is particularly interested in how epidemiological studies can be best designed to inform health-protective policy decisions. To date, Dr. Willis has primarily focused on how on exposures from the energy sector (e.g., oil and gas development, traffic-related air pollution) and other aspects of the built environment (e.g., green space, neighborhood disadvantage) influence reproductive health outcomes. Dr. Willis is PI of an NIH Director's Early Independence Award that examines how oil and gas development may impact fertility and pregnancy.