



Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment

Uinta Basin: Economic Hub or Health Hazard?



The issue: The Uinta Basin is a large region in northeastern Utah, home to the majority of Utah's oil and gas development. In recent years, the region has also seen heightened development interest in tar sands and oil shale, often referred to as non-traditional energy resources. Fossil fuels development is largely boom and bust industries which coincide with the world price of oil.



Utah saw its fossil fuels industry peak from 2011 to 2013, going from roughly 36 drilling rigs in 2013 to one in 2015. This peak in price and activity also coincided with a peak in infant mortality cases in the Basin during 2013, in which there were 13 reported cases. Based on the population #'s, this was roughly six times the national

average. As of October 2015, there have been 8 premature infant deaths in the Vernal out of an average 425 births in Uinta County. This is still at least four times the national average.

There are still approximately 11,000 actively producing oil and gas wells in Utah, the overwhelming majority of those located within 100 miles of Vernal, Utah, and nearly all are being fracked. As part of the industry, there are numerous **wastewater evaporation ponds, where the highly toxic wastewater from the wells is disposed.** Evaporating this water results in large emissions of volatile organic compounds (VOCs). A study from the University of Colorado in 2013 showed VOC levels in the Basin which equaled the amount from approximately 100 million cars.



Additionally, there are four currently active tar sands mining operations in the development phase. Recent water sampling tests in and around Vernal also indicate very high levels of hydrogen sulfide gas, possibly a result of area mining or oil and gas development.

The bottom line is that while the Uinta Basin has at times become an economic hotspot in Utah, it has a record of boom and bust. And while difficult to statistically prove, it appears to come with significant health risks. UPHE is advocating for increased levels of air and water monitoring along with more comprehensive health studies to help pinpoint actual causes and solutions.

What YOU can do:

- **In a related topic...**UPHE aims to expand our **“Air Pollution and Pregnancy”** campaign. Let us know if you or your organization are interested in hosting a seminar or simply getting more topical information. Also, volunteer opportunities may be available. Contact Beth at bhaynesuphe@gmail.com.
- **Join and support UPHE.** Go to www.uphe.org and sign up to become a member. You'll receive our newsletters, email updates, and 'take action' alerts. Your contribution enables UPHE to continue fighting for clean air and water. We NEVER share your information.
- **Follow us on Facebook** for up-to-date information and upcoming events: <https://www.facebook.com/utahphysiciansforhealthyenvironment/>
- **Let your voice be heard.** Watch for opportunities to participate, announced via our website, Facebook and email.

We can't do this work without your help! Please consider making a donation today.

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