



## **Public deserves Pinedale Anticline health study**

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Sublette County health professionals and scientists have made a reasonable request of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control to conduct a Health Impact Assessment on the Pinedale Anticline project area. Public officials and the oil and gas industry should cooperate to make certain such a study is completed.

Ozone, a gas whose molecular structure consists of three oxygen atoms instead of the usual two, is the primary component of smog. The recent discovery of high ozone levels in the Pinedale area has resulted in five unprecedented alerts about risks to the public's health. Such alerts are usually the province of smog-ridden metropolitan areas, not rural areas that only a few years ago enjoyed some of the cleanest air in the nation.

Ozone is highly reactive and capable of damaging living cells, such as those in the lining of human lungs. Increased ozone levels due to drilling activity are a real health hazard, particularly to children, the elderly, and those with respiratory conditions.

The Pinedale ozone levels, combined with other air quality concerns and groundwater contamination, grabbed the attention of the Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA found the Bureau of Land Management's plan to allow nearly 4,400 new natural gas wells on the Pinedale Anticline is "environmentally unsatisfactory."

The BLM's preferred Pinedale Anticline plan has the potential to create more air pollution than the EPA would allow under new federal air quality standards. In the interest of public health, the two agencies must get on the same page and reconcile their figures before the plan goes any further.

It's worth noting that a Health Impact Assessment for humans isn't part of the BLM's typical environmental analysis of a project. The elevated ozone levels in the Pinedale area were monitored as part of a visibility study. Since they've been discovered, however, health professionals must move quickly to determine the risks, in order to protect people's health without excessively delaying development.

One of the recipients of the Health Impact Assessment request was Gov. Dave Freudenthal, who frequently has said Wyoming's growth should be on the state's terms.

Surely one of the conditions the state must put at the top of its list is the health of its citizens.

The companies drilling in the anticline also have a major interest in protecting their workers.

It's a good sign that everyone who received the letter from Pinedale-area health professionals is taking seriously the request for a new assessment. As the 42 signers noted, while knowing about the recently exposed ozone dangers, the potentially undiscovered human health risks due to local energy development are of even greater concern.

"Health Impact Assessments are designed to address exactly this critical knowledge gap," according to the letter. That's why everyone with an interest in the Pinedale Anticline plan should welcome such a common-sense study.