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Media contact: Carolyn Raffensperger, (515) 450-2320, raffenspergerc@cs.com

Health Professionals and Scientists Groups Launch New Partnership to Address Fracking's Environmental Justice and Community Impacts

Biologist and author, Sandra Steingraber, PhD, named senior scientist at SEHN

Two leading organizations of health professionals and scientists focused on environmental harms, Concerned Health Professionals of New York (CHPNY) and the Science and Environmental Health Network (SEHN), are joining forces.

On June 1, 2021 CHPNY will become a major program of SEHN, launching a partnership that will enable both groups to expand their core research and outreach activities, translate that research into action to protect public health and the environment, and comprehensively serve frontline communities experiencing harm from fossil fuel projects. The partnership will also facilitate a dedicated focus on fracking's environmental justice implications, which are significant but have received far too little attention.

Concerned Health Professionals of New York began in 2010 as initiative to amplify the voices of hundreds of health professionals in New York calling for a moratorium on fracking and to serve as an online resource center for the public, press, elected officials and other health professionals. After fracking was banned in the state in 2015, CHPNY continued releasing updated editions of its signature work compiling the science on fracking, *The Compendium of Scientific, Medical and Media Findings Demonstrating the Risks and Harms of Fracking*. The seventh edition was released in December 2020.

Led by environmental attorney Carolyn Raffensperger, SEHN has, since 1998, been the leading proponent in the United States of the Precautionary Principle as a basis for environmental and public health policy and provides scientific, technical and legal resources for communities fighting environment injustice and for decision-makers. With the aim of enabling effective action through rigorous science, SEHN operates as a virtual organization, currently with five staff and six board members working from locations across the United States. Since 2014, SEHN has been working to support water protectors and pipeline fighters in North Dakota, Iowa, and Minnesota.

Housed within SEHN and led by biologist and author Sandra Steingraber, PhD and Carmi Orenstein, MPH, CHPNY will gain the capacity to better serve the climate justice movement, frontline communities, medical professionals, policymakers, members of the press, and elected officials.

Sandra Steingraber and Carmi Orenstein are both co-founders of CHPNY. Steingraber will serve as a senior scientist within SEHN and Orenstein as CHPNY's program director. Steingraber is coming to SEHN from Ithaca College where, since 2003, she served as Distinguished Scholar in Residence.

SEHN executive director Carolyn Raffensperger said, “Rachel Carson said that we had lost the capacity to ‘foresee and forestall’ the threats to the Earth. The world is changing rapidly. By combining forces, we at CHPNY and SEHN aim to hone the precautionary tools of science and law necessary to foresee and forestall the harms to the Earth and her people. This new partnership will allow us to expand our scientific and legal technical contributions to the environmental justice community that is undertaking the necessary work of dismantling the fossil fuel juggernaut. I am delighted to welcome Carmi Orenstein and Sandra Steingraber to the SEHN staff. The confluence of CHPNY and SEHN creates a mighty river of justice and health.”

Sandra Steingraber said, “I’m thrilled to join SEHN as a senior scientist. SEHN has long served as a thought leader and think tank for the environmental justice community. Any path to climate justice depends on an end to fracking and the build-out of its toxic infrastructure, and that’s where my research, writing, and advocacy work have been located for the past ten years. The growing global grassroots movement calling for an end to fossil fuel extraction needs to be informed and inspired by plainly spoken science that centers human rights and environmental justice. With the partnership and the support of SEHN—and with their deep legal and policy expertise—CHPNY can fill this role in more comprehensive and abiding ways. On a personal note, this is an exciting intellectual home for me.”

Carmi Orenstein added, “Our Compendium project has played a role in struggles around the United States, and indeed, the world, backing up communities in their rightful demands to be free of the risks and harms of fracking and to be part of a just transition to a healthy energy economy. Joining SEHN will greatly enhance our ability to provide responsive, science-based tools and resources for a greater number of communities, states, and nations struggling to prevent or stop the public health assault of the fossil fuel industry. SEHN has long inspired us at CHPNY. That inspiration now moves in-house!”

This collaboration launches at a moment when a growing body of evidence shows that methane from oil and gas extraction is a significant driver of the climate crisis and calls to end the practice of fracking have taken center stage. A forthcoming United Nations [report on methane](#) emphasizes that expanding the use of natural gas is incompatible with the targets set by the Paris Climate Accord. Emissions from U.S. fracking operations alone are responsible for [at least half of the total increase](#) in global methane emissions.

This partnership was made possible by a pilot grant from [Ceres Trust](#). The staff and board of SEHN and our new partners at CHPNY urge you to follow our work, use the research, and consider supporting our continued efforts with a donation.