

Testimony delivered to House Energy and Technology Committee
By Rachel Smolker, Ph.D.
Public hearing held April 24 2019,
Re: Bills H.51, H. 175, H. 214

Dear Committee members

I am codirector of Biofuelwatch, an international NGO working on climate and land use issues. I am also a resident of Hinesburg and part of a small group that has been fighting the VGS ANGP pipeline for several years now. I have a Ph.D. in biology and have been a reviewer of the IPCC reports on climate change.

As you may be aware there is now an independent investigation into the Vermont gas pipeline due to revelations indicating multiple systemic violations, lack of compliance with not only the minimal federal safety regulations, but also the many promises of construction to a higher standard that were agreed to under the ACT 248 proceedings which granted this project a certificate of public good.

In light of what we now know about climate, about methane and about fossil fuels, fossil fuel infrastructure cannot possibly be considered a public good.

CLIMATE: Others have already pointed out the climate impacts resulting from methane emissions during extraction and transport of shale oil and gas which are accumulating at an alarming rate.

EMINENT DOMAIN: Many Vermont friends and families have been faced with undesired construction of the Vermont Gas pipeline through their property. Preventing construction of a fossil fuel infrastructure project on your land is nearly impossible. There is always the looming threat of eminent domain proceedings and costly legal challenges.

DANGEROUS INFRASTRUCTURE: Most people simply cut their losses and are left with a very dangerous piece of infrastructure on their land. The Pipeline Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) reports that between 1999 and 2018 there were 11,991 incidents, 318 fatalities, and 1304 injuries and resulting costs over 8 billion dollars.(2)

We have friends and know families who live in what is known by the industry as “the incineration zone”. There is no such thing as an incineration zone around

solar panels or wind turbines.

POOR INVESTMENT: A report released by Global Witness just today is titled “Overexposed: How the IPCC 1.5C report demonstrates the risks of overinvestment in oil and gas.”(1) That report states investment in oil and gas will result in stranded assets during the inevitable transition to cleaner energy - and is incompatible with the Paris Accord, thus would result in escalating financial losses from climate change itself. Investment in fossil fuels is not compatible with Vermont’s own stated goals for renewable energy.

I and many others have committed to oppose fossil fuel infrastructure. That too takes a toll on people. Just in the past few weeks we have sorted through just the most recent set of over 17 thousand documents. This task is unpaid work done on top of our regular paid jobs and family lives. In fact we have to pay to do it - because we need a lawyer in order to participate in the process. This unfair disadvantage renders effective citizen led opposition to fossil fuel infrastructure untenable for most people. And we cannot rely on our DPS which has proven ineffective.

But people **will** give their all to resist fossil fuel infrastructure. Because we know we have to stop burning fossil fuels. Our future depends on it. Our children are relying on us. And in the end, how can we possibly live with ourselves if we do not do everything in our power to protect? Please Act swiftly and decisively to pass Bills H.51, H. 175 and H. 214.

1) Overexposed: how the IPCC 1.5 report demonstrates the risks of overinvestment in oil and gas”.

<https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/oil-gas-and-mining/overexposed/>
“Overinvestment in oil and gas creates risks for investors, regardless of whether the world is effective in tackling climate change. Either investors face assets being stranded as demand for fossil fuels falls in a transition to a low carbon economy, or the overinvestment contributes to excess emissions from fossil fuels, the failure to transition and the financial costs of a dramatically changed climate.”

2) PHMSA incident report data:

<https://hip.phmsa.dot.gov/analyticsSOAP/saw.dll?Portalpages>

