



# Health and Environmental Impacts from Invenergy's Allegheny Energy Center



Alamos Gas Power Plant. Image taken by Omnitographer (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

## Background

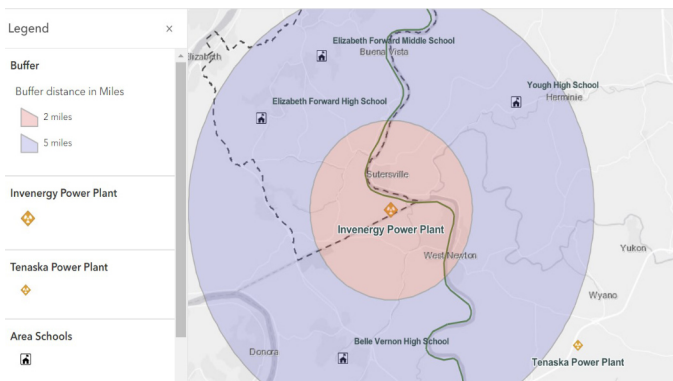
Allegheny County consistently fails to meet federal health-based standards for air pollution. Invenergy wants to build the Allegheny Energy Center - a natural gas-fired power plant - in Elizabeth Township in the southeastern corner of Allegheny County. Positioned close to the county line, the proposed plant would not only increase pollution for the local community within the county, but also release pollution into communities on the other side of the county line, outside the jurisdiction of the Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD). The power plant would emit air pollutants known to be harmful to human health as well as greenhouse gases that worsen climate change.

Natural gas-fired power plants are large industrial facilities that generate electricity from burning natural gas. The Allegheny Energy Center would be a 639 MW power plant and would emit air pollutants which would cause increased risks for lung and heart diseases and cancer. The power plant would emit many air pollutants of concern, such as nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>), fine particulates, and hazardous air pollutants such as benzene, formaldehyde, and toluene. All of these pollutants can cause adverse effects on human health and air quality. The community will not benefit from the electricity being generated, yet will bear the health and environmental risks. The electricity would go directly into the PJM grid, which transports it in the electricity wholesale market for 13 states and Washington D.C.

## About Invenergy

Invenergy is a Chicago-based energy company that touts itself as a global leader in the development and operation of sustainable energy. It lists 159 wind and solar projects on their website. Despite this potential for renewable development, Invenergy's projects in Pennsylvania continue to rely on natural gas.

Invenergy's first Pennsylvania project, the Lackawanna Energy Center in Jessup, PA, was built amid contentious community opposition. The US Environmental Protection Agency lists the plant as having had a "high priority violation" of the Clean Air Act from October 2020 to December 2021. The facility was issued a violation with a penalty of \$47,262 for not complying with the conditions of its air permit. The EPA also lists the Lackawanna facility as being in non-compliance with the Clean Water Act for failure to properly manage stormwater runoff according to EPA best practices.



Invenergy's proposed Allegheny Energy Center and surrounding region. ArcGIS Map Rendered by Clean Air Council.

## Zoning Concerns

In 2017, Elizabeth Township Commissioners voted 4-3 to pass a controversial ordinance and zoning changes despite hours of testimony given by residents opposing it. The proposed zoning text and map revisions were written by Invenergy LLC and rezones nearly 147 acres from Rural and Residential land to Light Industrial zoning districts.



Community zoning meeting. Image courtesy of Mountain Watershed Associations

This revision also allows gas-fired power plants as a 'permitted use' in Light Industrial zoning districts. Permitted uses require the least review of any zoning permit approval process and are usually reserved for development that is unlikely to impact the surrounding community. Power plants and other larger polluting facilities will often require a conditional use or special exception approval after review by a zoning hearing board, planning commission, or board of commissioners and must provide opportunities for public comment. This controversial ordinance and zoning decision is being closely monitored by local residents and Yough Communities CARE and the decision is likely to be legally challenged.

For some context, it is now as easy to build a gas-fired power plant in Elizabeth Township as it is to build a garden center, which is also listed as a 'permitted use' in Elizabeth Township's Light Industrial District.

## Air and Health Risks

**Nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>)** exposure can cause respiratory inflammation and exacerbates heart and lung issues such as asthma, emphysema, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

**Greenhouse gases (GHG)** like methane and carbon dioxide are driving climate change. Climate change will lead to hotter and longer summers that worsen air pollution by increasing ozone smog.

**Volatile organic compounds (VOCs)** can cause cancer; some are suspected or known carcinogens. Elevated exposure can include eye and respiratory irritation, headaches, nausea, and memory impairment.

**Particulate matter 2.5 (PM<sub>2.5</sub>)** can get deep into lungs and cause serious health problems. PM<sub>2.5</sub> can cause premature death in people with heart or lung disease, and aggravate asthma.

**Hazardous air pollutants (HAPs)** are pollutants that are known to cause cancer, respiratory, neurological and developmental impacts.

**Sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>)**: short term exposure can cause respiratory inflammation and increased asthma symptoms.



Yough Communities Conserving Air Rivers and Environment (CARE) group. Image courtesy of Yough Communities CARE

To get involved contact us at  
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