

For Immediate Release - March 16, 2021

Shell's Falcon Pipeline Under Investigation for Serious Public Safety Risks

Ohio River Valley - Shell's Falcon Ethane Pipeline System (Falcon Pipeline) is under investigation for issues that pose serious threats to public safety, workers, and critical natural resources.

The investigation is focused on possible noncompliance with construction and public safety requirements and alleged cover up of incidents that could put the public at risk, according to documents obtained by FracTracker Alliance. The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP), the Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General, the Pipeline Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) have all been involved in investigations into the Falcon Pipeline's construction, which is designed to deliver ethane to Shell's petrochemical facility in Beaver County, Pennsylvania for plastic manufacturing.

While public knowledge of these investigations is limited, allegations against Shell Pipeline Company suggest that the pipeline may have been constructed with defective corrosion coating protection. Secretary of the PA DEP Patrick McDonnell stated in a [February 2020 letter to Administrator of PHMSA](#) Howard Elliott that these issues “pose a possible threat of product release, landslide, or even explosion.”

Twenty-nine regional groups are [calling on state and federal agencies](#) to fully investigate construction incidents and the pipeline's integrity, take all necessary enforcement actions to ensure Shell Pipeline Company follows the law, and halt all work and operation of the Falcon Pipeline unless it can be proven that this pipeline will not threaten public safety.

The 98-mile pipeline system passes through Ohio, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania, and impacts major drinking water sources like the Ohio River, the Ambridge Reservoir, and the Tappan Lake Reservoir. According to FracTracker [analyses](#), there are over 8,700 people living in the “vapor zone” — the radius reflecting the regions that could be impacted by pipeline incidents such as explosions. This is in addition to 5 schools, 6 day care centers, and 16 emergency response centers.

Furthermore, investigations by the PA DEP have uncovered instances of employees being fired in retaliation for speaking out about construction concerns. This culture of fear is further evidenced by [previous reports](#) of Shell employees afraid to share their identities while speaking out against working practices that were not in line with COVID-19 precautions.

Additionally, FracTracker Alliance's previous record reviews highlight serious concern with Shell Pipeline Company's execution of horizontal directional drills (HDDS), [summarized here](#). These issues are made more serious by the allegation that employees are falsifying reports of and/or failing to report inadvertent returns.

Residents of the Ohio River Valley know too well the serious and life-threatening impacts that have come from rushed pipeline construction in the wake of the fracking buildout. Of particular concern with the Falcon Pipeline is the allegation of defective pipeline corrosion coating, as FracTracker has found that corrosion failure is the second leading cause of incidents for hazardous liquid pipelines like the Falcon. We hope that regulators will take all necessary action to protect public welfare and bring justice for workers who may have been unfairly terminated.” - **Erica Jackson, Manager of Community Outreach & Support, FracTracker Alliance**

“Oil and gas pipelines have turned rural SE Ohio into a fractured landscape of fossil fuel infrastructure. Construction of the 97-mile Falcon Pipeline has caused over 70 spills and has contaminated surrounding ecosystems with thousands of gallons of drilling fluids. In addition to threatening the habitat of the Eastern Hellbender salamander, this pipeline places the well-water for hundreds of local residents in jeopardy from extreme sedimentation. The Falcon Pipeline poses a risk to the watershed of the Ohio River, the drinking water source of over 5-million people.” - **Randi Pokladnik, Ph.D. Environmental Studies, Tappan Lake Resident, Harrison County, Ohio**

“These documented problems with construction of the Falcon Pipeline pose serious threats to public safety, workers, and critical natural resources. Given the fragile geological bedrock in our area and the fact that the Falcon will transport hazardous liquids, defective pipeline corrosion coating could lead to disastrous outcomes. A thorough investigation should take place.” - **Statement by Beaver County Marcellus Awareness Community (BCMAC)**

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Additional resources

- FracTracker Alliance’s Falcon Public Environmental Impact Assessment:
<https://www.fractracker.org/projects/falcon-public-eia/>
- Photo and video assets available upon request