

Impact of shale gas "ignored" in England, new study finds

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The UK Government and its advisory groups "marginalised or ignored" the environmental and public health ramifications of permitting shale gas extraction in England, according to new research.

The cross-disciplinary study from the University of Stirling found that industry was able to influence decision-making within the political, legal and planning framework—to the detriment of public health, with vulnerable and disadvantaged communities at greatest risk.

The Scottish Government has built a more ethical and environmentally just decision-making process into its [energy policy](#) linked to shale gas, the team added.

Published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, the study is the first of its kind—connecting [environmental justice](#), air pollution and ethics—to examine the environmental and public health aspects of decision-making processes related to the shale gas industry in England. Professor Andrew Watterson, of the Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport, and Dr. William Dinan, of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, collaborated on the project.

Professor Watterson, head of the Occupational and Environmental Health Research Group, said: "Our study looked at how environmental justice and ethics are considered in decisions around shale gas development, which has been shown to adversely affect air quality and

contribute to climate change.

"The findings reveal that decision-making by the UK Government and several of its advisory groups marginalised or ignored the ethical and environmental justice consequences—and, hence, the public health ramifications—of permitting the shale gas industry.

"We found that science was frequently ignored and industry was able to influence decision-making within a political, legal and planning framework in England, to the detriment of public health."

The team analysed science on air pollution and [shale gas](#) linked to a range of adverse public health indicators, industry, planning and key concepts of ethical decision-making and environmental justice. It included the analysis of official government, regulatory and planning documents, as well as industry and scientific publications, and benchmarking against the science and ethical and environmental justice criteria.

Dr. Dinan, an expert on [political communication](#) and the mediation of environmental and [public health](#) issues, said: "Aside from the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change is the biggest issue facing the world and requires urgent action.

"Government, legal and planning decisions around [climate change](#) and air pollution is of the greatest importance to society. Local communities, governments, policymakers, civil servants, non-governmental organisations, and the sustainable energy industries may all benefit from the results of our research.

"Any new policies should ensure that there are ethical approaches to proposed shale exploration and environmental justice concerns must be incorporated into planning and decision making."

More information: Andrew Watterson et al. Lagging and Flagging: Air Pollution, Shale Gas Exploration and the Interaction of Policy, Science, Ethics and Environmental Justice in England, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2020). DOI: [10.3390/ijerph17124320](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17124320)

Provided by University of Stirling

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