

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Back to the Future: Ohioans Still Poisoned After All These Years

*In 1986 – one year after the state of Ohio sanctioned oil & gas waste “brine” spreading on roads – it was discovered that brine contains high levels of benzene. State protection agencies were alarmed and lobbied for a ban of brine spreading, but the practice continued. In 2017, tests by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) confirmed that brine also contains high levels of radioactive radium, but still no ban. After 36 years of spreading toxic and radioactive oil well brine on Ohio roads with the silent acquiescence of state officials, the people are clamoring to end this poisonous practice.*

**OHIO:** On Tuesday, November 15, 2022, Ohio residents delivered a letter to sundry cabinet-level Ohio officials, demanding a ban on the continued use of brine from oil and gas operations as a road deicer and dust suppressant. In the [letter](#), delivered to the directors of Ohio’s Department of Health (ODH), Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OHEPA), the Governor, Speaker of the Ohio House, President of the Ohio Senate, Chair of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, and Chair of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, the Ohio Community Rights Network (OHCRN) – along with 27 other organizations throughout Ohio – asserted that state agencies and elected public officials have long known about the dangers of oil & gas waste “brine” (O&G brine) but have nevertheless allowed the hazardous practice of “brine” spreading on Ohio’s roads to be inflicted upon the public and the environment for nearly four decades. The letter was also sent to Representative Mary Lightbody in support of [House Bill 579](#) – which she introduced -- to prohibit road surface application of brine from oil and gas wells in Ohio.

OHCRN members have advanced local lawmaking to protect freshwater ecosystems across the State of Ohio, and in many cases the state has put [obstacles in their way](#). All 28 organizations have worked for environmental and health justice for all Ohioans.

"The spreading of toxic and radioactive well waste brine on Ohio roads and other surfaces threatens all Ohioans," stated FaCT Brine Education Committee Chair, Ron Prosek. "You could be living or traveling anywhere in Ohio and potentially be exposed to this dangerous material. This is one of the most reckless practices that the State of Ohio has ever allowed."

Citizen researchers discovered newspaper articles from 36 years ago that revealed tests conducted by ODNR reporting high benzene concentrations in O&G brine as the environmental surprise of 1986. The articles (see references) also stated that ODH, ODNR, and OH EPA were so alarmed, they called for a ban on oil well brine spreading. However, during 2017-2019, ODNR – the agency with authority from the state legislature to oversee this practice – conducted [tests on O&G brine from 151 wells \(tests summary\)](#) that revealed high concentrations of radium which exceeded both federal and state radioactive limits into the environment, yet state officials continue to allow its spreading on Ohio roads.

According to a [2020 investigation published in Rolling Stone Magazine](#), the O&G industry is fully aware of these radiation issues and has been since the early 1900s.

"It is just unfathomable that these state agencies, which are supposed to protect Ohioans' health and the environment, have allowed this dangerous practice of "brine" spreading to continue for the past 36 years with their silence", stated OHCRN President Bill Lyons.

Alarming, the Ohio Legislature has repeatedly introduced bills (most recently, [House Bill 282](#) and [Senate Bill 171](#)) that would commodify "processed" brine and authorize astonishingly high concentrations of 20,000 picocuries/liter for Radium-226 and 2,500 picocuries/liter for Radium-228. Ra-226 has such a long half-life that, at these concentrations, it would take more than 10,000 years for it to decay to a safe level. Even more disturbing, these bills would allow this "processed" brine to be used in portable restrooms with no mention of where that waste will be deposited.

"The people are revoking any semblance of permission to be used as guinea pigs for toxic and radioactive "brine" spreading on our roads that poisons the water, the soil, our bodies, and all life within the ecosystem – all for the convenience and profit of disposing this hazardous waste from the oil & gas industry", stated Susie Beiersdorfer, OHCRN Board member from Youngstown. "If the legislature passes a law making this O&G byproduct a commodity, it gives the producers liability protections, makes it even more difficult for residents to sue for harm, and we can then expect to see it on store shelves, just like RoundUp."

"OHCRN and the undersigned organizations, as well as a growing number of concerned residents, will no longer tolerate the pollution for profit that destroys the health and well-being of Ohio's people and the environment. We all agree that the egregious practice of O&G "brine" spreading in Ohio must end immediately", stated Tish O'Dell, OHCRN Board member from Cuyahoga County. "Our elected officials must represent and legislate for the health and well-being of people and Nature, and not be influenced by

O&G industry lobbyists. When state agencies do not protect the environment, including the health and well-being of residents, we must speak out to expose the harms and the corrupt system that allows this, and hold accountable those who are responsible.”

We must stop the poisoning NOW so that our children, and their children, never go back to this "future".

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To read testimony about HB 282/SB 171:

<https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-committee-documents?id=GA134-HB-282> and  
<https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-committee-documents?id=GA134-SB-171>

**Reference List:**

[“Benzene in Brine Raises New Toxicity Questions”](#), *The Columbus Dispatch (OH)*, April 17, 1986

[“State Agencies to Push for Ban Against Oil-Well”](#), *Akron Beacon Journal (OH)*, April 17, 1986

[“Brine and Ground Water”](#), *The Columbus Dispatch (OH)*, April 28, 1986

<https://www.ohiocrn.org/toxic-trespass>

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***About OHCRN — Ohio Community Rights Network***

*The Ohio Community Rights Network was formed in 2013 with a mission to educate, empower, and motivate Ohioans to build equitable communities, to secure the right of democratic local self-governance, and to establish the rights of Nature to exist and flourish throughout Ohio.*