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Frequently Asked Questions:

[Click here for definitions of the abbreviations](#) used in the Survey, which can be printed for further reference.

(Note - [Question-by-Question Instruction \(QQ\)](#) links and [Submission Instruction \(Sub\)](#) links on this page are numbered so you can find them easily.)

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If your question is not answered by these FAQs, our [Submission Instructions](#) or our [Question-by-Question Instructions](#), contact us by email at Survey@DamascusCitizensATSDR.org, by phone at **(845) 252-6677** or by mail at: **DCS, P.O. Box 147, Milanville, PA 18443.**



(FAQ #1) - Who is Damascus Citizens for Sustainability (DCS)?

[Damascus Citizens for Sustainability \(DCS\)](#) is a not-for-profit, grassroots, conservation, education and advocacy organization. Our purpose is to protect our watershed region and help communities across the nation do the same. We collaborate with universities, national, regional, and local organizations, business and community leaders, elected officials, farmers, artists, and other citizens to preserve and protect clean air, land and water as basic civil and human rights.

Our volunteers are in direct contact with leading experts in the fields of hydraulic fracturing, geology, health and community impacts, while our team of experts and lawyers are engaged in several critical lawsuits and public hearings within the [Delaware River Basin and Watershed](#). In honor of the hard work of our organization, Josh Fox dedicated his award-winning and Oscar-nominated film, [Gasland](#), to DCS.

DCS can be contacted by email at Survey@DamascusCitizensATSDR.org, by phone at **845-252-6677**, and by postal service at **DCS, PO Box 147, Milanville, PA 18443**. And if you're passing through the Upper Delaware River Basin, stop by our storefront on Main Street in Narrowsburg, NY.

(FAQ #2) - Why did Damascus Citizens for Sustainability create the Natural Gas Exploration and Production (NGE&P) Health and Community Impacts Survey?

As an organization concerned with educating the public about the realities of unconventional gas drilling, we saw a need to collect the details of the hundreds of stories of the harms caused by natural gas exploration and production in a rigorous, systematic way that would provide a basis for objective analysis. We have designed the Health and Community Impacts Survey to collect those details in order to trigger [Public Health Assessments](#) by the [Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry](#). With this Survey we wish to correct many things; among them, the situation of people being ignored and having their experiences dismissed as “anecdotal” because those experiences have not been officially reported. As Survey data is collected, DCS will be making every effort to get assistance to impacted households and communities. For more on why the Survey was created, please see the [Introductory Letter from Damascus Citizens' Director](#).

(FAQ #3) - What is the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)? What is a Public Health Assessment? What is a Community Assistance Panel?

[ATSDR](#), a sister agency to the CDC, is a federal public health agency that focuses on the human health impacts of exposure to hazardous substances. Its work falls into four categories: protecting the public from hazardous exposures; building the toxic substances knowledge base; educating health care providers and the public about toxic chemicals and maintaining health registries. [ATSDR's Congressional mandate](#), the agency's [vision, mission, goals and core values](#), and [its demonstrable impacts on public policy](#) are among the reasons DCS encourages you to use the Survey to [petition ATSDR](#) for a Public Health Assessment.

An ATSDR **Public Health Assessment** (PHA) reviews available information about hazardous substances at a site and evaluates whether exposure to them might cause any harm to people. Public Health Assessments consider- what the levels (or "concentrations") of hazardous substances are, whether people might be exposed to contamination and how (through "exposure pathways" such as breathing air, drinking or contacting water, contacting or eating soil, or eating food), what harm the substances might cause to people (or the contaminants' "toxicity"), whether working or living nearby might affect people's health, and other dangers to people, such as unsafe buildings, abandoned mine shafts, or other physical hazards

To make those determinations, ATSDR looks at three primary sources of information-

- Environmental data, such as information about the contaminants and how people could come in contact with them
- Health data, including available information on community-wide rates of illness, disease, and death compared with national and state rates
- Community concerns, such as reports from the public about how the site affects their health or quality of life

A **Community Assistance Panel** (CAP) may be formed by ATSDR when the agency is evaluating the possible public health impact of environmental contamination in your area. The CAP is a way for the community to participate directly in ATSDR's evaluation and make sure community concerns are addressed in any ATSDR report. Help the Agency make sure your Multi-Household Group's concerns are part of their assessment process. An example of a vocal, active and effective [Community Assistance Panel](#) was established to work with [ATSDR at Camp Lejeune](#). The link will take you to the governance document under which that CAP operates.

(FAQ #4) - Who should take the Survey?

If you, members of your [Household](#) - or people or areas you know of - have been affected or impacted by natural gas exploration and production activities, you should take the Survey. You can take the Survey even if you do not live within the [Survey Impact Area](#) of your concern.

(FAQ #5) - Who should NOT take the Survey - Should I complete the Survey if I'm involved in legal action related to NGE&P or if I have signed an NDA?

If you are involved in legal action related to natural gas exploration and production, consult an attorney before completing or submitting this Survey. If you have signed a [Non-Disclosure Agreement \(NDA\)](#), you probably **should not** take the Survey and should consult an attorney.

(FAQ #6) - How do I get hold of the Survey?

You can access both the online Survey and the manual download version of the Survey [HERE](#) on our NGE&P Survey homepage; either from the "Survey Information Menu" or on the right of the page in the red text. Completing and submitting the Survey online is the best way for [ATSDR](#) to compile and process your Survey responses, but if you are unable to take the Survey online and unable to download or print out the manual version, contact us by email at Survey@DamascusCitizensATSDR.org , By phone at **845-252-6677**, or by postal service at **DCS, PO Box 147, Milanville, PA 18443**.

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(FAQ #7) - What questions are asked in the Survey? Are question-by-question instructions available?

A complete list of the questions - and instructions for each one - can be found in our [Question-by-Question Instructions](#) - or you can visit the [NGE&P Survey home page \(http://www.damascuscitizensatsdr.org\)](http://www.damascuscitizensatsdr.org) where you'll find easy links to all our Survey helps.

(FAQ #8) - What is the “Confidentiality Agreement”?

Before beginning the Survey, you will be asked to acknowledge understanding of the Confidentiality Agreement. Here is the text of the agreement:

[Damascus Citizens for Sustainability](#) (DCS) will not share your personal information or survey answers without your express permission.

[The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry](#) (ATSDR) is a federal agency charged with the protection of human health. In the course of its work, ATSDR may forward your survey answers and personal information to the [Environmental Protection Agency](#), your state environmental and health departments and the [US Coast Guard's National Response Center](#).

(FAQ #9) - What is the “Petition Letter” to ATSDR?

The “Petition Letter” to ATSDR is a formal document - in this case, a letter that requests a [Public Health Assessment](#) in your [Survey Impact Area](#) and the creation of a [Community Assistance Panel](#) from your area to work with ATSDR during the PHA process. **Your Petition Letter is very important**, as without it ATSDR’s Public Health Assessment process cannot be triggered. ATSDR requires that the Petition Letter contain specific information from each [Household](#). The Letter is included in the Survey whether you are completing and submitting the Survey online or manually. If you are taking the Survey online, the necessary information for the Letter will be entered automatically as you complete the Survey. If you are taking the Survey manually, the Letter is included in the your printed version of the Survey and you will enter the necessary information by hand.

(A [Public Health Assessment \(PHA\)](#) is an ATSDR document that examines hazardous substances, health outcomes, and community concerns at a hazardous waste site to determine whether people could be harmed from coming into contact with those substances. The PHA also lists actions that need to be taken to protect public health [compare with [Health Consultation](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/com/consult.html) at <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/com/consult.html>].)

(FAQ #9a) - If I can't take the Survey online, how do I complete the Petition Letter manually?

The [Petition Letter](#) required by [ATSDR](#) must contain certain components in order to trigger the Agency's [Public Health Assessment](#) process. [DCS](#) has integrated those components into the Survey. As you answer the first three questions, look to see where they belong in the Petition Letter and fill them in.

(FAQ #10) - What is a Survey Impact Area? What is meant by "Community-at-Large"?

Your Survey Impact Area (SIA) is the area around your [Household](#) (or, if you are working as a group, Households) that you want to report as being impacted by NGE&P activities. The report (in the form of this Survey and [Petition Letter](#)) of the impacts you have experienced, is what [ATSDR](#) needs in order to trigger a [Health Consultation or Public Health Assessment](#) in your area.

Your Community-at-Large encompasses areas where you work, shop, recreate, and engage in community activities and where your children go to school, engage in community activities, play with their friends, etc. We leave the size of your Community-at-Large up to you to decide. (Your Community-at-Large is usually larger than your [Survey Impact Area](#), but in some rare cases, If NGE&P activity is widespread in your area, your Community-at-Large could be smaller than your Survey Impact Area.)

(FAQ #11) - What is a Household? What is a "head of Household"?

A Household can include many people - or just one - living full-time in a single residential unit whether or not they are members of the same family. (For instance, if seven unrelated college students live in an off-campus apartment, they would be considered a "Household".) For the purposes of this Survey, "full-time" means four+ days per week and six+ months per year. A Household could be renting - or may own its residence. If you are in your home less than four days per week, but still consider yourself to be residing there full- time, please contact DCS.

If you do not live within the [Survey Impact Area](#) of your concern, please fill out the survey as if you were the head of Household in the Survey Impact Area of your concern.

The head of Household is the person ATSDR will contact when they are ready to assess your situation. Your head of Household will maintain all originals of the copied documents your Household submits to [ATSDR](#) and [DCS](#).

(FAQ #12) - What is a Multi-Household Group? What is a Multi-Household Group Coordinator?

A “**Multi-Household Group**” (MHG) is a group of [Households](#) in a [Survey Impact Area](#) that submit their Surveys and [supporting documents](#) using a unifying [Multi-Household Identification](#). Each Household in an MHG completes a Survey individually, but all Households in the group then submit their [Survey Packets](#) using the [Group Identifier](#). A Multi-Household Group may contain as few as two households or hundreds, and provides the most complete picture of NGE&P’s impacts in their Survey Impact Area and [Community-at-Large](#). In a large metropolitan area, larger MHGs can be separated into smaller Survey Impact Areas.

A **Multi-Household Group will select a “Group Coordinator”** who will help facilitate the completion of all the group’s Surveys, serve as the main contact when [ATSDR](#) is ready to assess your area’s situation, maintain a list of each [head of Household](#) in the group and their contact information, and notify [DCS](#) when all of the group’s Surveys have been submitted. When DCS is sure that all Surveys from an area have been submitted, we will create a Group [Composite Report](#) from your area and transmit it to ATSDR in order to trigger a [Public Health Assessment](#).

(FAQ #13) - What is a Household Identifier? What is a Multi-Household Identifier?

Each [Household](#) will complete their own Survey. Each Survey will have its own, unique (different from all other Households’) “**Household Identifier**” (HID). If you are taking the Survey online, this HID will be automatically generated for you. If you are taking the Survey manually, you will need to create one. To do this, add your [head of Household](#)’s birth year and your Household’s 5-digit ZIP Code to your surname Example: (Johnston + 1983 + 12723). The unique HID in this instance would be “Johnston198312723”

If you are working with a [Multi-Household Group](#) - in addition to your HID, your group will need to create a **Multi-Household Identifier** (MHID). **This should be done before starting the Survey**. When all individual Household Surveys in an area are completed, The group then submits their [Survey Packets](#) with the MHID on each group Survey, ensuring that those Surveys will be kept together and viewed as a whole. Submitting your Survey Packets as a group provides [ATSDR](#) with the most complete picture possible of NGE&P’s impacts in your area. Your Multi-Household Identifier will consist of:

- An approximate **location** of your Multi-Household group (for example: Fort Worth), your Multi-Household Group’s primary **ZIP Code** (the first 5 digits only), the **date** your Multi-Household Group was formed (for example, May 3, 2013 would be **5313**).

So if your group is located in Fort Worth Texas, has a ZIP Code of 76108 and was formed on May 3, 2013, your MHID would be: **FortWorth761085313**)

(FAQ #14) - I want to work together with other Households in my area. How do I make the Survey a community project?

The more [Households](#) that submit Surveys from a single [Survey Impact Area](#), the better. We urge separate Households to find each other, pool resources and share experiences, so the impact of their Surveys is maximized. Here are some idea for making the Survey a community project:

- **Email us!** at Survey@DamascusCitizensATSDR.org, or call us at (845) 252-6677. After years of education and grassroots organizing, [DCS](#) has built working relationships with individuals and groups in most of the states where NGE&P exists, as well as in Norway, France, Australia, South Africa and many other countries.
- Hold a house meeting and invite those who might have information to share about the impacts of NGE&P activities in your [SIA or Community-at-Large](#). Make a list of Households that might want to complete their Surveys together.
- Find community service or advocacy groups who are addressing NGE&P activities in your area.
- Many clinics and health providers will allow community groups to post flyers of general interest. Create a flyer that explains who you are, what you're doing and why.

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**(FAQ #15) - What are my “supporting documents”?**

Supporting documents are records (medical, veterinary or other) diaries, medical or environmental (water, air or soil) test results , photos, emails, letters, or anything that supports the answers and comments you have given in this Survey. If you believe you have been impacted by NGE&P activities, your physicians' records, medical test results and environmental test results will help document that impact.

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**(FAQ #16) - What should I do if I run out of space in a comment box or space?**

If you are taking the Survey online, you will find that the comment boxes accompanying the questions usually provide ample space. If you run out of space in a comment box, please note in the comment box that you are adding an additional page for your continuing answer. (e.g. “Please see my continued answer for question #\_.”) You can use Word, Note Pad, Text Edit, Pages, etc. to add extended comments. Be sure to save your extended answer documents in a place on your computer where you can find them easily.

If you are completing the Survey manually, you can use the back of the Survey page to add an extended answer. If the back of the Survey page does not provide ample space, you can continue on a fresh sheet of paper. Just be sure that your extended answer page indicates the number of the question you’re answering.

**(FAQ #17) - How do I save the Survey as I work on it online? Can I change an answer? Do I have to finish in one sitting?**

Always navigate the Survey using the Survey’s “back” and “next” buttons, **not your browser’s**. Your Survey responses will be saved automatically when you click on the Survey’s “back” button or proceed to the next page. If, while taking the Survey, you want to go back to change an answer, you can do so. The information that has been automatically inserted into your Petition Letter will also update, as long as you click on the Survey’s “back” button or proceed to the next page to save your changes.

You can complete the Survey in multiple sessions. To do this, get the link from the bar at the very top of every Survey page. You’ll only need to do this once. You’ll enter your email address and click the save button, and will receive an email with a link that will take you back to your Survey at the point where you left off. **The same link will always take you back to your Survey at the last point where you left off, so *don’t delete the email with the link!***

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**(FAQ #18) - What if I can't answer a question? Can I move to the next if I get stuck? (for online completion only)**

That depends on whether the question is **\*required**, or “soft required”. Required questions contain information that is essential for [ATSDR](#) to be able to initiate a [Public Health Assessment \(PHA\)](#) and a [Community Assistance Panel](#) in your area. You must answer all required questions in order to complete the Survey. If you miss a required question, you will get this message:

*“There was an error on your page. Please correct any required fields and submit again,”* followed by a link that directs you to (*“Go to the first error”*). Click on that link and it will take you to the question you missed.

Most of the questions are what we call “soft required,” which means you can skip them if you can't, or don't wish to answer them. **If you can't or don't want to answer a question, leave it blank.** When you try to move to the next page without answering a soft required question, you will be taken back to the unanswered question (just once) with this message above it:

*“Please answer this question if applicable or if you can. You are being brought back to this question (one time only) in case you missed it.”*

If you've skipped a question and you want to go back to fill it in, or if you want to change an answer, you can do so. The information that has been automatically inserted into your Petition Letter will also update accordingly, as long as you click on the Survey's “back” button or proceed to the next page to save your changes.

(\*Note - If the information requested in the Survey is not available or the resources for getting it are too costly, [DCS](#) is securing funding to help [Households](#) and [Multi-Household Groups](#) defray the costs of copying and mailing documents. If you need assistance, please contact us for more information by email at [Survey@DamascusCitizensATSDR.org](mailto:Survey@DamascusCitizensATSDR.org) by phone at **(845) 252-6677**, or by mail at: **DCS, P.O. Box 147, Milanville, PA 18443.**)

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**(FAQ #19) - What is my submission choice? (for online completion only)**

You will make the choice of how you would like to submit your Survey and [supporting documents](#) (by email, by postal service, or a combination of both) by clicking on the appropriate button at Question #39. These are your choices as they appear in Question #39.

- I am sending my Survey and supporting documents by **email**
- I am sending hard copies of my Survey and supporting documents by **postal service**
- I am sending my Survey by **email** and my supporting documents by **postal service**

**(FAQ #20) - What is a “hard copy” document?**

A hard copy document is anything you can hold in your hand. For example a printed or disc version of the Survey, printed test or medical results, hand written or printed diaries - photos or documents on a disc, video, DVDs, etc.

**(FAQ #21) - What is a cover sheet?**

**A cover sheet is a document that identifies who you are and what you are sending.** We have prepared a [cover sheet](#) to be included with all supporting documents submitted separately from your Survey by postal service, and for any subsequent batches of supporting documents you might send. Using the cover sheet will ensure that your supporting documents are united and kept together with your completed Survey, even if they are received separately or become separated in the submission or compilation process.

The cover sheet is available for download or printing [Here](#) or by contacting us by phone at **(845) 252-6677**, [Survey@DamascusCitizensATSDR.org](mailto:Survey@DamascusCitizensATSDR.org) or writing to us at **DCS, P.O. Box 147, Milanville, PA 18443**.

If you are unable to use our cover sheet, make sure you send your document submission with a sheet of paper which includes:

- Your [head of Household's](#) name and address
- Your [Household's](#) unique [Household Identifier](#)
- If you're working in affiliation with a [Multi-Household Group](#) (MHG), your unique [Multi-Household Identifier](#)
- If you're working in affiliation with an MHG, the name and contact information for your [Multi-Household Group Coordinator](#)

**(FAQ #22) - What is my “Survey Packet”?**

Your Survey Packet is what you will submit after completing the Survey. It will include:

- Your completed Health and Community Impacts Survey
- Your “[Petition Letter](#)” to ATSDR
- Copies of your [supporting documents](#) (no originals, please!)
- A [cover sheet](#) if you are sending any part of your Survey Packet separately from the rest by postal service.

**(FAQ #23) - Why should I send DCS a copy of my Survey Packet?**

By sending [DCS](#) a copy of your [Survey Packet](#), you help create an independent, secure and confidential backup record of your Survey, [Petition Letter](#) and [supporting documents](#) sent to [ATSDR](#). You will also be helping DCS to map national impact areas and maintain an independent record of events in those areas. In addition, you will enable DCS to act as a link to ATSDR to advocate for you in order to foster a [Public Health Assessment and convene a Community Assistance Panel](#) in your area.

(DCS is securing funding to help households and [Multi-Household Groups](#) defray the costs of copying and mailing documents. If you need assistance, please contact us by email at [Survey@DamascusCitizensATSDR.org](mailto:Survey@DamascusCitizensATSDR.org), by phone at **(845) 252-6677**, or by mail at: **DCS, P.O. Box 147, Milanville, PA 18443.**)

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