

January 28, 2014

Thomas Farrell  
Chairman, President, and CEO  
Dominion Resources  
701 East Cary Street  
Richmond, VA 23219

From:

Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments • AMP Creeks Council • Annapolis Divest • Calvert Citizens for a Healthy Community • Chesapeake Climate Action Network • Choptank Riverkeeper • Citizen Shale • Environment Maryland • Greenbelt Climate Action Network • Gunpowder RIVERKEEPER • HoCo Climate Change • Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake • Interfaith Power & Light • (DC.MD.NoVA) • League of Women Voters of Maryland • Maryland Environmental Health Network • Midshore Riverkeeper Conservancy • Myersville Citizens for a Rural Community • Sierra Club, Maryland Chapter • South Riverkeeper • Transition Howard County • University of Maryland Student Government Association • Waterkeepers Chesapeake • Wicomico Environmental Trust

## **Why did Dominion's fracked gas plant explode in September and what new safety steps will Dominion take to protect Marylanders from Cove Point gas operations?**

Dear Mr. Farrell,

On September 21, 2013, a large explosion and active fire broke out at the Blue Racer processing plant for hydraulically fractured shale gas. The facility -- in Kent, West Virginia -- is co-owned and operated by Dominion Transmission. The blast was felt miles away and the fire was seen across the Ohio River in Clarington. The fire burned for at least six and half hours, closing nearby roads and a rail line and forcing residents to evacuate. Although no one has been reported injured, one nearby resident told the local newspaper that the explosion was "a terrifying experience. It looked like the whole valley was exploding. The whole sky was orange and it sounded like landing airplanes." Four months later, your company -- Dominion -- still has not told the public what caused the accident and the plant remains damaged and out of service as of January 13, 2014.

Given that Dominion now wants to build an even larger gas processing facility for fracked gas -- \$3.8 billion in cost -- at Cove Point in Lusby, Maryland, we the undersigned leaders from across Maryland have urgent questions concerning safety at the proposed Cove Point facility. The Blue Racer plant was brand new. It blew up just four months after coming on line in the summer of 2013. Prior to that facility's opening, Dominion Transmission senior vice president Paul Ruppert said the plant "will be a world class facility." He said, "(Blue Racer) is being constructed to the latest industry standards to be an extremely reliable plant..." Yet the September explosion happened, the facility is still closed, and residents report feeling unsafe, particularly because Dominion has offered no explanation.

Now Dominion is making almost identical assurances of safety and reliability vis a vis the Cove Point plant to local residents in southern Calvert County, Maryland. The Cove Point facility – which will liquefy hydraulically fracked gas from across Appalachia for export to Asia -- would process four times the gas volume of the Blue Racer plant. Obviously, an explosion and fire at Cove Point could have an even greater impact for Southern Calvert County and could be potentially catastrophic.

**Because of these stakes, we request the following information:**

- 1) When will the cause of the explosion at Dominion's Blue Racer gas facility in West Virginia be explained to the public?
- 2) What detailed safety lessons have been learned from the Blue Racer explosion and what changes might be needed to your design plans to convince the Maryland public that a similar accident can be prevented at Cove Point?
- 3) Have these safety lessons and engineering changes been explained to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the Maryland Public Service Commission?
- 4) After the Blue Racer explosion, local residents told the media that Dominion had no alarm system in place and that residents were forced to evacuate on their own, with no instructions from Dominion staff. Only after the explosion did your company implement an alarm system to warn nearby residents to evacuate after any future possible explosions at the still-closed plant. What similar warning system will you put in place for Maryland residents living close to the Cove Point plant?
- 5) Given that residents of the Cove Point area in Calvert County have limited escape routes, how will you plan for potential road closures from explosions? Has the unexpected Blue Racer explosion lead to any new precautions you will need to take at the existing or expanded Dominion facilities at Cove Point?

Considering the grave seriousness of these safety issues – and given your company's declared goal of beginning construction of the \$3.8 billion Cove Point gas facility by the spring of 2014 – we ask that you please respond to our questions no later than February 1<sup>st</sup>.

Thank you,

Environmental, health, community, and faith groups (see attached)

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Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments

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