

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League

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August 6, 2020

The Honorable Ralph Northam
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor Northam:

Request to suspend all work on Mountain Valley Pipeline Mainline and Southgate Extension during the COVID-19 pandemic

I am writing on behalf of our chapters in Virginia along the Mountain Valley Pipeline route. We continue to appreciate the steps you have taken thus far to protect Virginians. However, based on the severity of the COVID-19 outbreak and the critical need to control it, **we are requesting that you prevent an influx of thousands of out of state pipeline workers into southwest and southside Virginia.**

Per the EQM Midstream Partners 2020 First Quarter Earning Call¹, company officers stated they are prepared to move in to quickly finish the upland construction once FERC lifts its stop-work order – even if the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has not reissued its Clean Water Act Section 404 permit.

Dr. Deborah Birx, the White House coronavirus task force coordinator, recently said in an interview with CNN² that, "What we are seeing today is different from March and April. It is extraordinarily widespread. It's into the rural as equal urban areas." The virus has now infected more than 4.6 million Americans. "To everybody who lives in a rural area, you are not immune or protected from this virus," she added.

As you know, we are starting to see an increase of cases in rural Virginia. That is true in the

¹ Motley Fool Transcript, EQM Midstream Partners LP Q1 2020 Earnings Call, May 14, 2020, <https://www.fool.com/earnings/call-transcripts/2020/05/14/eqm-midstream-partners-lp-eqm-q1-2020-earnings-cal.aspx>

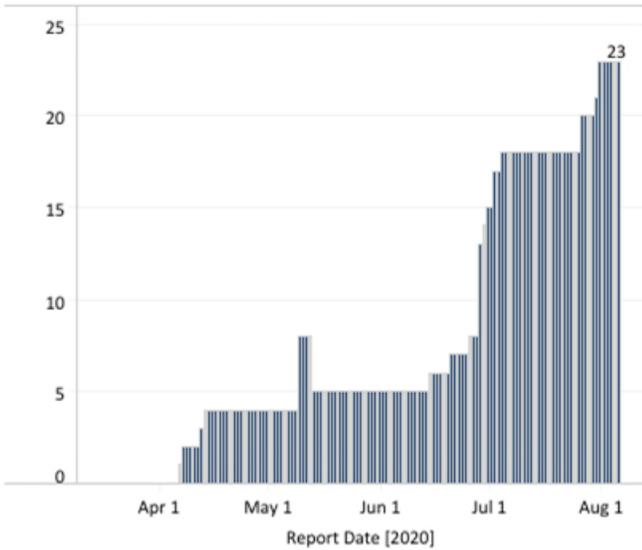
² <https://www.cnn.com/videos/health/2020/08/02/birx-rural-america-coronavirus-new-phase-sot-vpx-sotu.cnn/video/playlists/coronavirus/>

southwest and southside counties traversed by the Mountain Valley Pipeline. The following table looks at the number of cases in each listed county on the first day of the month.

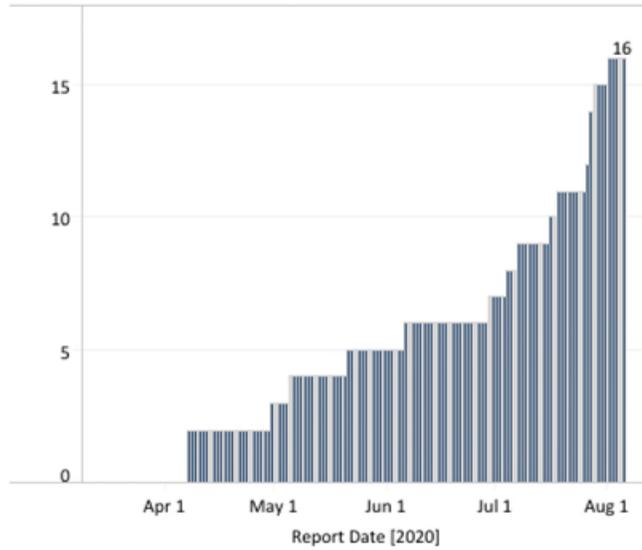
Number of COVID-19 cases ³						
Date	Giles	Craig	Montgomery	Roanoke	Franklin	Pittsylvania
4/1/2020	0	0	1	4	5	1
5/1/2020	4	3	56	53	21	13
6/1/2020	5	5	78	106	36	44
7/1/2020	15	7	147	253	91	122
8/1/2020	23	16	275	437	156	329

Below are Virginia Department of Health charts showing cumulative cases for each county.

Report Date Cumulative - Giles

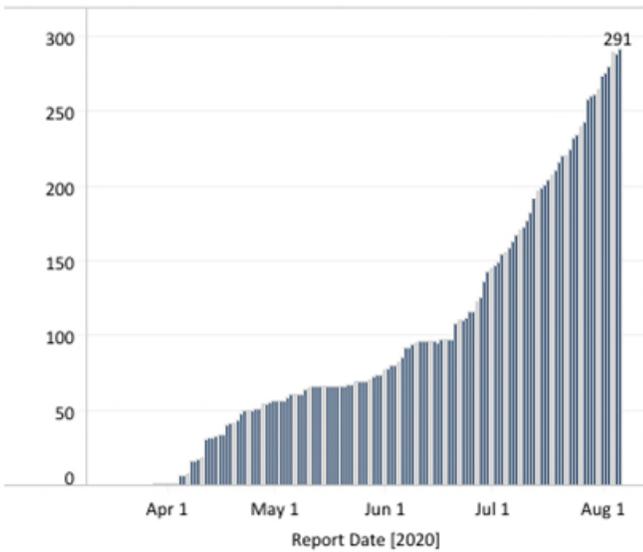


Report Date Cumulative - Craig

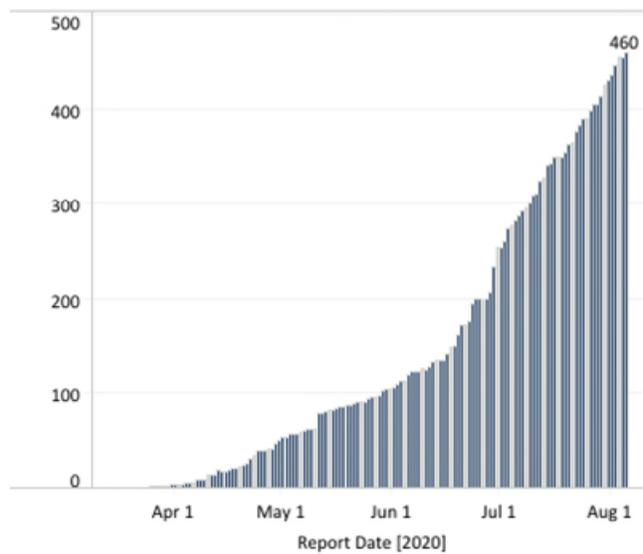


³ <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/covid-19-daily-dashboard/>

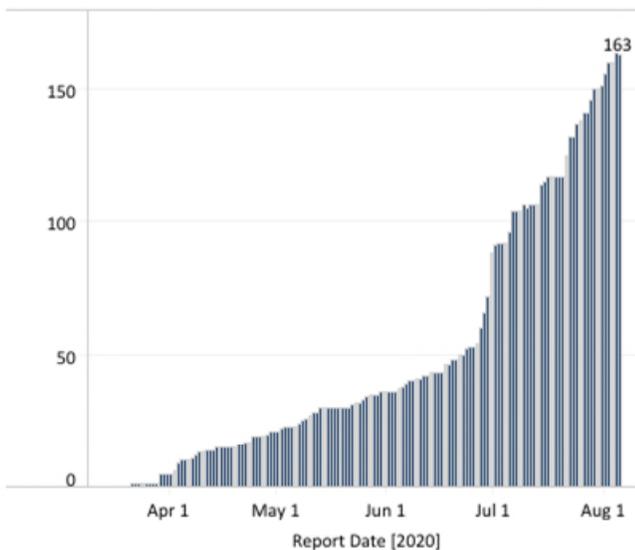
Report Date Cumulative - Montgomery



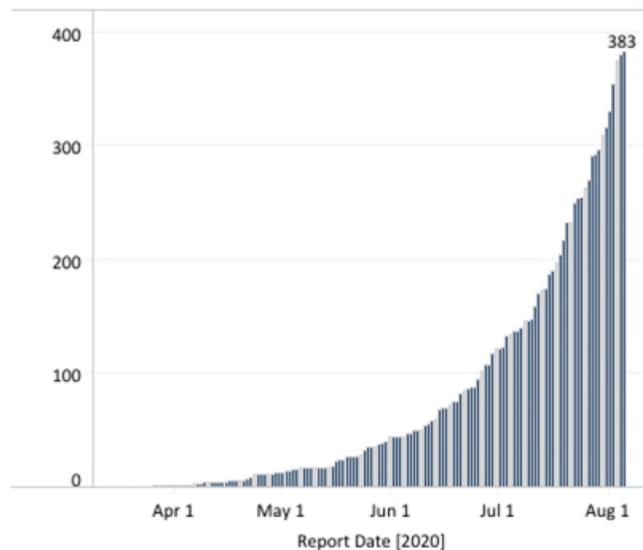
Report Date Cumulative - Roanoke County



Report Date Cumulative - Franklin County



Report Date Cumulative - Pittsylvania



While we are seeing an increase in the number of cases in these counties, for the most part, they are relatively low when compared to the rest of Virginia. There are 132 counties and cities listed in the New York Times compilation of VDH data. When ranking the per 100,000 cases for each locality, none of the counties traversed by the Mountain Valley Pipeline fall within the Top 50 % of Virginia localities with the most cases. Only Roanoke and Pittsylvania counties fall within the Top 75% of most cases.

Number of COVID-19 cases per 100,000 ⁴						
Category	Giles	Craig	Montgomery	Roanoke	Franklin	Pittsylvania
Cases	138	312	292	484	293	630
VA Rank	130	111	116	83	114	69
Top 50 %	No	No	No	No	No	No
Top 75 %	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes

We also point out the small number of ICU beds in these communities.⁵ These ICU beds are not just utilized by residents from counties traversed by MVP but residents throughout southwest and southside Virginia.

Locality	ICU Beds
Giles	0
Craig	0
Montgomery	22
Roanoke Co.	0
Roanoke City	71
Salem	36
Franklin	4
Pittsylvania	0
Danville	34

We have grave concerns that adding thousands of workers – many coming from states currently designated as “hot spots” for COVID-19 – will not only significantly increase the number of cases in these counties but will also put an undue burden on our local healthcare system. Most of the skilled pipeline workforce comes from Texas, Oklahoma, Ohio and West Virginia.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation - a non-profit organization focusing on national health issues - Virginia, which is currently labeled as a “hot spot”, was listed on August 5 with a 6.7% positivity rate based on a 7-day rolling average. Texas had a positivity rate of 14.0%, Oklahoma a rate of 8.3%, Ohio at 5.5% and West Virginia was at 3.1%; however, West Virginia showed an increase of 22.7% in cases.⁶

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/virginia-coronavirus-cases.html> & <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/covid-19-daily-dashboard/>

⁵ <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/2020-03-24/graphic-availability-of-icu-beds-around-the-nation>

⁶ <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/state-data-and-policy-actions-to-address-coronavirus/>

We also point out that on April 7, many employees of an out of state MVP contractor, who specializes in environmental studies, were observed working along the incomplete MVP route in Franklin County. Several Environmental Solutions and Innovations (ESI) vehicles, mostly with Ohio tags, were observed in the county. These workers were not adhering to mandated stay at home and social distancing orders. This was just after you had declared a state of emergency for Virginia in March “ to protect the health and safety of Virginians and mitigate the spread of the novel coronavirus, or COVID-19.”



ESI vehicles, mostly with Ohio tags, parked off a rural road in Franklin County, VA on April 7.



ESI workers in Franklin County, VA on April 7.

These contractors did not follow the recommended health precautions for COVID-19 in April. It is your responsibility to act or they could do the same again.

As you know, there is still a lot that health experts don't know about this novel virus. However, we do know that the CDC has stated that if a COVID-19 outbreak happens in your community, it could last for a long time.

Given what we do know about the COVID-19 outbreak, we hereby request you prevent an influx of thousands of out of state pipeline workers into southwest and southside Virginia during this ongoing pandemic.

Respectfully submitted,



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