

In 2014, by a 59 percent majority, Denton - Denton Record-Chronicle (TX) - April 28, 2018 - page EDIT01

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In 2014, by a 59 percent majority, **Denton** residents voted to ban **hydraulic fracturing** (fracking) within our city limits.

In response, the Texas Legislature, no stranger to the largesse of the oil and gas industry, passed House Bill 40, banning **Denton's** ban and stealing the authority of all Texas Home Rule municipalities to enact local ordinances protecting the health and safety of their residents and environments.

Scientific studies continue to add to the weight of evidence documenting the health hazards of the drilling and fracking processes since the passage of HB-40 in 2015.

A recent (March) study by researchers at the Colorado School of Public Health, Boulder, Colorado, County Public Health and Colorado University at Boulder concludes, "We found that air pollutant concentrations increased with proximity to an oil and gas facility, as did health risks. Acute hazard indices for neurological, hematological and developmental health effects indicate that population living within 500 feet of an oil and gas facility could experience these health effects from inhalation exposure to benzene and alkanes (toluene, ethylbenzene and xylene)."

The report is available at <https://bit.ly/2GOiPUY>.

In plain language, the closer one lives to a well, the greater the exposure to poisonous air emissions that scientists warn can potentially cause leukemia, endocrine disruption, asthma, preterm birth and fetal death.

Denton's current gas well ordinance, revised and adopted in 2015 in the shadow of HB-40, mandates a maximum setback distance of 1,000 feet and a minimum setback of 500 feet for new gas wells drilled in existing neighborhoods. For new residential developments, the reverse setback distance for building near an existing well is only 250 feet.

The Colorado study also found that the lifetime cancer risk of living within 500 feet of a well was eight times higher, 8.3 per 10,000, than the Environmental Protection Agency's upper-level risk threshold of 1 in 10,000.

What is the cancer risk for a family living within 250 feet of a well? Why is it that buyers of new homes near existing gas wells have even less protection than established neighborhoods? Shouldn't we all be equally protected?

The answer is that this is no longer an oil and gas industry issue, but a developer issue. And developers have considerable influence. Thus, the absolutely inadequate reverse setback of 250

feet enables the developer to squeeze as many new homes as possible into the development.

Simply stated, it means more profit for the developer and less protection and more risk for the buyer.

Our City Council and staff can and should address this issue, especially with the massive amount of development forecast for **Denton**. It should also be addressed because of the safety issues of well blow-outs, fires, chemical spills and explosions, all of which have occurred in **Denton**.

The nightmare of the gas well fire in the West Gate neighborhood in May 2015 (<https://bit.ly/2Kb1zay>), the unresolved seepage of methane into an abandoned water well next to a residence on Old Alton Road in 2017 (<https://bit.ly/2vMwxmg>) and the proximity of wells to our schools (<https://bit.ly/2HstsJu>) all demand a transparent discussion and precautionary actions.

The city does have the power to prevent developers from building homes in close proximity to hazardous industrial activities like gas wells. It's time to open the discussion. We should all be equally protected by an ordinance that takes into account the health and safety of our new neighbors and their children.

ED SOPH lives in **Denton** and is a professor of jazz studies at the University of North Texas.

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Guest Column

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