

Fracking protesters arrested - Denton Record-Chronicle (TX) - June 2, 2015 - page NEWS_A01

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STAFF WRITER | Page NEWS_A01

Three Denton residents could face criminal trespassing charges after they were arrested early Monday morning in front of the entry to a gas well site on the city's west side.

Adam Briggie, 38, Niki Chochrek, 24, and Tara Linn Hunter, 31, were released from Denton City Jail on personal bonds after being detained for about three hours Monday morning.

The trio joined about two dozen other protesters at a Vantage Energy gas well site just after dawn Monday. The group descended on the entry and chained it closed with a giant copy of the citizens initiative banning hydraulic fracturing in Denton. The protesters said they were there to enforce the ban, which was overwhelmingly approved by Denton voters in November.

Denton's ban was effectively nullified when Gov. Greg Abbott signed House Bill 40 on May 18. Vantage notified the city it would resume fracking in Denton on Monday.

The new law also affects local rules in about 300 other Texas cities, greatly limiting their ability to regulate oil and gas activities.

Police officers used bolt cutters to remove the initiative sign and reopen the entryway. They cautioned the group that the company's entry way was private property. By blocking it, the protesters risked criminal charges for trespassing. Officers advised the people to move their protest to the public area along the side of the road.

Briggie, Hunter and Chochrek sat in front of the cattle guard and refused to move. Briggie said it was their intent to block the entrance until 7 p.m. One employee in a pickup was able to get past the trio, but a small convoy of semi-trailer trucks was not.

In an interview later, Hunter said it was important that the ordinance was attached to the gate.

"It was important that they had to move that ordinance out of the way physically in order to frack," Hunter said.

Police advised the trio that they risked arrest if they continued to sit in front of the gate. When they didn't get up, they were placed in handcuffs. Officers took Briggie, Hunter and Chochrek to the city jail about 7:40 a.m. The remaining protesters took up spots along the road and away from the gate.

Vantage Energy spokeswoman Nancy Farrar said Monday's protest did not significantly delay operations. The company had not decided whether to pursue criminal charges against the

protesters.

Officers arrested Briggle, Hunter and Chochrek on Class B criminal trespassing charges, which can carry up to a \$2,000 fine and 180 days in jail. The case is expected to be forwarded to the Denton County district attorney, police said.

First Assistant District Attorney Jamie Beck did not immediately return a call for comment Monday afternoon.

Pamela Ferguson of 20 Minute Bail Bonds offered to bail the trio out for free before word came that they would be released on personal bond, which means they didn't have to put up any money to get out of jail.

"This was a peaceful protest," Ferguson said.

Briggle said the arraignment after his arrest went quickly. He was taken from a holding cell in the detention area to a desk where the judge sat.

Members of the news media were not allowed into the hearing. Typically, court proceedings are open to the public and are not allowed to be conducted in secret.

Briggle said the judge explained his rights and he signed the paperwork. Then, a jailer returned his personal items. All three surrendered their **Frack Free Denton** T-shirts because they weren't allowed to wear layers of clothing in jail, he said. When he was released about 10:40 a.m., Hunter and Chochrek were waiting for him.

Longtime Denton County resident Melvin Paddack said he was troubled by news of continuing protests over HB 40 and Denton's ban. The Argyle resident said he owns some property near Krum with oil and gas leases on it.

"I know these people [protesters] think they're doing right, but it's hard for the younger generation to relate to what we endured to get here," Paddack said.

He grew up near Roanoke. His mother cooked with wood or kerosene and hot water was a luxury, he said. When natural gas service came to Roanoke in the 1950s, his father built a new house with running hot water.

"My heart cries out that people could enjoy the new technology and the benefits," Paddack said.

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