

Gas well foes band together - Denton Record-Chronicle (TX) - November 7, 2015 - page NEWS_A01

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KRUM - Sheila Achuff knows what it's like to live in the oil patch. Nearly a dozen gas wells surround her 1-acre property just south of Krum, a town of 4,500 people in western Denton County.

Since moving into the Spring Hill Estates in 1998, Achuff has witnessed several waves of the natural gas boom that first hit Denton County in the early 2000s, driven by the rise of hydraulic fracturing.

"I heard there are safer ways to frack," she said. "I heard that the oil and gas company can enclose the gas well site in a bubble, so that all the chemicals stay inside there."

Achuff recently formed Frack Free Krum, a group of concerned residents who seek to bring change to the small rural community where oil and gas wells can be found near the town square and next to Krum ISD's administration building.

She got the idea from the Denton Drilling Awareness Group, a nonprofit organization whose members created the slogan "Frack Free Denton" during the 2014 campaign to ban fracking in Denton city limits.

"I'm not wanting to shut down every single frack station," Achuff said. "I just want them out of the neighborhoods."

Questions over water

Achuff first learned about some of the dangers associated with hydraulic fracturing in October 2014 when she said she and other neighbors received an emergency call from Aqua Texas, a utility company that provides water to 53 counties across the state.

Achuff said she was told not to drink or cook with the water because it was contaminated, though they could still bathe in it.

"It was disgusting," Achuff says. "No one should have to bathe in nasty sand and yellow water. It was like taking a bath in the lake."

Vantage Energy was drilling a well just around the corner from Spring Hill Estates, and Achuff said she thought the oil and gas company was responsible for the contamination. She said they couldn't drink or cook with the water for six weeks.

But Aqua Texas denied the contamination had anything to do with hydraulic fracturing.

Kaitlin Moyer, a spokeswoman for Aqua Texas, wrote in an email response that Aqua Texas' records show one occurrence of fine sand in the groundwater well that serves the Spring Hill Estates community.

"This is a common occurrence during periods of drought and results when the well pump brings in sand due to low levels of water," Moyer wrote.

Moyer pointed out that during this time, the water continued to meet and outperform all local and federal health regulations, and the issue was resolved to the satisfaction of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

Vantage Energy could not be reached by press time Friday.

"Neither company will admit to it," Achuff says. "It has never happened until they started fracking."

Achuff said both the **Denton** Drilling Awareness Group and Blacklands Prairie Rising, another anti-fracking group, invited Achuff to share her story with their supporters when the campaign to ban fracking in **Denton** was in full swing last year.

Achuff started reading articles about the dangers of hydraulic fracturing, trying to educate herself so she could protect her children and grandchildren, some of whom were beginning to experience nosebleeds.

When **Denton** voters banned fracking within **Denton** city limits, Achuff says she finally felt relieved. Granted, the gas wells that surrounded her home wouldn't be affected by the ban. But at least no more would be coming into the area, she says.

Then Austin lawmakers in May passed House Bill 40, which limits the ability of Texas local governments to regulate oil and gas production in their jurisdictions.

Concerned neighbors

Frack Free Krum had its first meeting Monday night at the Golden Chick in Krum. Many of the group members weren't able to attend because of work and other personal issues. But nearly a dozen people showed up to discuss short- and long-term goals, Achuff said.

The group agreed they needed to follow some of Krum's sister cities that require a setback of 1,500 feet for gas wells from existing structures, instead of the current requirement of 300 feet. They plan to approach Krum City Council members at the council meeting in December.

In her mobile home south of Krum, Achuff stressed again that she is not against the oil and gas industry. She understands many people around the Krum area rely on the industry to provide for their families.

But she is concerned for the safety of her teenage daughter who attends high school in Krum and her grandchildren who attend day care in Krum, because of gas wells around town, including one not too far away from her grandchildren's day care.

"We just don't want them in our neighborhoods," Achuff says.

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