

Test Regularly – And Act On – Drilling Site Emissions

Fort Worth League of Neighborhoods

As an organization of citizens devoted to the welfare of Fort Worth neighborhoods, we believe it is now imperative to determine the extent to which the air we breathe is impacted by gas emissions from the more than 1,600 gas wells located in our city. It is time for the City of Fort Worth to dedicate some of its gas well revenues for regular, independent, gold standard testing of sites throughout our city, particularly those located near schools, health care facilities, and neighborhoods. We cannot afford to wait any longer for state agencies, which some say are underfunded and understaffed, to do the testing for us.

At least one local municipality and some private citizens have already done testing at or near gas drilling sites which has produced troubling results. Alarming high levels of sulfides as well as higher than normal levels of the carcinogen, benzene, and chloroform were found 1/3 of a mile from a producing well site just outside west Fort Worth.

Air testing in the town of Dish, just north of Fort Worth, found unacceptable levels of volatile organic compounds being emitted at the site of multiple gas compressors there. A recently released health survey of a sampling of Dish residents showed that more than half of surveyed maladies (respiratory ailments and headaches, brain disorders, pre-cancerous lesions and impairment of motor skills) may be attributable to toxins found in the initial air testing.

Due, in part, to these concerns, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TECQ) has begun testing at 60 sites in a five county North Texas area. Some of those sites are in Fort Worth. TCEQ's DFW regional staff responds to complaints but does not do general testing in Fort Worth on an ongoing basis. The agency has called on the local natural gas industry to voluntarily test its sites.

We disagree with the notion that only the state is responsible for testing for unacceptable hazards from gas wells. Where public health is concerned, we must be vigilant before the fact rather than after the horse is out of the barn.

Fort Worth must seize the initiative and determine for its citizens what the air quality issues related to gas wells may be and then move quickly to address those issues. If we wait to let state agencies do our work for us, we may never get a handle on our potential problem.

Our mayor is on the record as saying that Fort Worth puts people first. We couldn't agree more. What people are concerned about is how gas wells affect the air we breathe. It's time we find out.

