

Air Quality vs Natural Gas Drilling

February 8, 2010

There has been much discussion of late on this issue to include several articles in the *Star-Telegram* and postings on the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) Website at www.tceq.com. The CHA letter mailed on Feb. 5 was not able to address the recent articles because of our long lead time in getting the more than 1,200 letters printed, folded, stuffed, addressed, and delivered to the bulk mail postal facility. This is my effort to address the issue more fully, and it reflects my personal opinions on the subject.

Why should you consider my opinion on this subject since I am not a technical expert on this subject? I have lived and worked around the oil and gas industry for several years and have made considerable effort of late to learn about the issue. I worked two summers during college at Texaco tank farm operations, I lived two years in Odessa surrounded by oil wells while working for an oil field supply company, I was a petroleum officer in the US Army working with petroleum operations to include huge petroleum storage and distribution facilities, I participated in inspections of pipelines, pump stations, and storage facilities. More recently, I have closely observed a number of gas drilling sites in Fort Worth, toured one active Chesapeake drill site, and toured a separate pad site to see the production phase operations. I have attended training seminars where the City's gas well inspection program was explained. I have attended several City Council sessions where citizens debated the pros and cons of gas drilling. I diligently study related articles in the *Star-Telegram* and occasionally research other articles. I have also had a number of discussions of the issues with other neighborhood leaders, Chesapeake energy representatives, and other knowledgeable people to include two petroleum engineers who are not associated with Chesapeake.

The impact that gas drilling has on air quality is a complex issue. Some newspaper articles have tended to sensationalize the issue by citing isolated incidents and implying that these are the norm for the industry! I firmly believe that the gas drilling industry has the experience, the technical ability, and the commitment to operate in a manner that does not degrade the air quality. The TCEQ has verified that there has been no lowering of the ambient air quality in Fort Worth due to gas drilling operations. However, there could occasionally be an issue at a particular site at a particular time. Even so, the gas industry has already invested millions of dollars in lease bonuses and stands to make many millions from their drilling operations. They have a strong vested interest and capability in maintaining good air quality so that they can continue their drilling operations.

A key aspect of this issue is how best to monitor the emissions. This is also a complex issue because there are many questions relating to what methods to use, what elements are tested for, the standards of the test, what locations are to be tested, and the frequency of the tests. Additional questions relate to who will receive the results of the test, who will have what enforcement powers, and who will pay for the costs of the testing. On

Feb. 2, the City Council discussed the possibility of the City initiating and paying for some of the tests.

The TCEQ recently released the results of tests they conducted in Dec. 2009 at 126 assorted gas drilling, fracturing, and production sites within Fort Worth. Their samples showed “either non-detection or levels of volatile organic compounds (VOC’s) below levels which would cause any short-term or long-term concerns.” A subsequent report released on Jan. 27, 2010, addressed testing results in a five-county area. They found two problems with benzene that had already been corrected when TCEQ learned about them. I strongly recommend you check their website at www.tceq.com and read all their reports on air quality in the Barnett Shale.

There are three major factors that would tend to greatly reduce the potential for hazardous emissions at the pad sites planned for our area. First, they will use electric powered drilling units that totally eliminate the emissions versus the alternative of large diesel engines running twenty four hours per day. Second, there will be no “flaring” because the wells will be immediately connected to pipelines. Third, there will be no compressor stations with large diesel engines running twenty-four hours per day virtually forever. (However, they will need to use compressors for the first few days to “prime the pump” so to speak to get the flow started in the pipelines.)

At this point in time, I believe that we should proceed with caution to approve the proposed drilling pad sites but also work toward closely monitoring the air quality as the methods, standards, procedures, cost sharing, etc. are resolved in the coming months. I believe that there are sufficient safeguards in place now that we will not be endangering the health of our neighbors.

Glen Estes
President, CandleRidge Homeowners Association