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Like other residents, she sees no way to definitively prove why it all happened in the first place.

"That's what drives me crazy," Wilkes said.

Going to court

That definitive-proof problem hampers residents who want legal redress. Health impacts by their very nature are hard to prove, said Ilan Levin, a Texas-based attorney who is associate director of the **Environmental Integrity Project**, a nonprofit research and advocacy group.



Bob Parr and his stepdaughter, Emma Duvall, with their horses on their property in Wise County, Texas. Parr, his wife Lisa and her daughter are surrounded by gas wells and won a lawsuit against one of the operators after airborne chemicals sickened them. Jamie Smith Hopkins/Center for Public Integrity

"So, of course very few people bring suits for injuries," he wrote in an email. "Of those who do, the vast majority settle and sign gag orders."

Those gag orders — called nondisclosure agreements — pose a problem for people researching health effects.

"We've had sites where we were monitoring 14 people and the industry came in and paid each one \$50,000 to get out of the study," said Brown, with the Southwest Pennsylvania Environmental Health Project. "We can't follow them anymore."

A rare case that went forward without settling — and **succeeded** — was

A rare case that went forward without settling — and **succeeded** — was brought by the Parrs, the Wise County couple who live near the spot where the TCEQ investigator was sickened by fumes in 2010. A Dallas jury awarded them \$2.9 million in April, a verdict the company has appealed.

Aruba Petroleum said in a statement that the award “represents an attempt by the jury to compensate the plaintiffs for alleged toxic tort injuries that fail for lack of causation evidence required under the law.” The company owns wells near the Parrs, including the one the TCEQ found in violation, but is not the only operator in the vicinity.

“No evidence was presented that proved that plaintiffs’ alleged injuries resulted from Aruba’s operations,” the company said in its statement.

The Parrs, whose suit alleged the company had created a nuisance, came with documentation that most people who suspect health impacts can only wish they had.

At a doctor’s suggestion, Lisa Parr started a health diary of her mounting symptoms in the hopes of figuring out a cause. Soon after, the Parrs discovered that a family on their street was keeping another detailed log — of emission events from nearby wells. Those events matched up with times Lisa Parr felt particularly bad, including occasions when she ended up at the emergency room, she said.

The neighbors had also hired a scientist to test their air. Bob Parr, on hand to fix a fence when the consultant arrived with the results, listened in dawning comprehension as she explained the implications of the chemicals she’d found.

Health problems had already hit the entire family by that point, including Lisa’s daughter, then in elementary school. All three of them and some of their horses had nosebleeds. Cows were giving birth to calves that weren’t

right — tiny, hairless and in some cases dead.

Bob Parr's blood pressure rose. Daughter Emma Duval was diagnosed with asthma. And Lisa Parr, a stay-at-home parent at the time, could barely function.

She had trouble speaking and walking. Rashes broke out over her body. Several times a week, she'd wake up and vomit something that looked like foam. In July 2010 an environmental health specialist tested her blood and found many of the chemicals the TCEQ had just detected in the air four days earlier.

The specialist urged them to move. The family squeezed into the small house that serves as Bob Parr's office.

After the TCEQ violation and the lawsuit, Aruba shut down the well the Parrs suspected was the worst offender. That helped, they said. They're back in their home.

But Lisa Parr, 46, worries about the long-term effects. And she doesn't know whether the shut-down well might someday be restarted.

"I have asked in depositions," she said. "They won't answer us."

New neighbors

The new neighborhood in Denton, a city of 123,000 north of Argyle and Flower Mound, looked perfect. Malle Bush and her husband just wanted to know the plan for the empty land nearby. Homes and a future park, the builder told them.



They bought in four years ago — missing, as many neighbors did, the paragraph buried in closing paperwork that warned how else the land could be used.

The rigs went up in August 2013. Drilling was about to commence 450 feet from Bush's house in one direction and 750 feet away in another.

Another family of four, the Ogletrees, calculated that they were just 182 feet from the closest site.

The work stretched to April, an industrial operation amid suburban brick homes and beautiful lawns. Heavy equipment arrived, along with too many vehicles to count — a single shale-gas well can demand hundreds of truck trips.

Bush tracked the noise with a monitor, getting readings on her property consistent with a kitchen blender on high. "Frac sand" — which releases fine particles that can cause the lung disease silicosis — sat in big piles and blew everywhere, she said. Now there's a compressor station in the neighborhood, too, its equipment sending out emissions that another North Texas resident picked up on an infrared camera.

Bush, who said she's not prone to sinus infections, had one this year so bad that four rounds of antibiotics didn't help. She had surgery in October and still isn't back to normal.



Maile Bush and her two children, Kaden (right) and Cassidy, stand behind their yard sign advocating for a ban on fracking in their city of Denton. Bush rarely lets them play in the yard these days because she's concerned about air pollution from the gas wells and compressor station near them. Jamie Smith Hopkins/Center for Public Integrity

She's more worried about her son, though. Before the work started, his asthma was under control. Now, she said, he frequently needs two inhalers a day rather than one. He went from a no-nosebleed kid to a boy who develops them weekly.

"I understand that correlation is not causation, I understand that, but it's kind of suspicious," said Bush, 41, who keeps both her children indoors as much as possible now. "If there is a chance, a tiny chance — if there is a 1 percent chance — that fracking is contributing to my child's problem, then there is a problem. And we need to stop and take a step back and figure out what the impacts are before we just go off willy-nilly making people sick."

The state **Railroad Commission**, which despite its name regulates drilling, said it sets no minimum distance between gas wells and homes. The TCEQ-mandated minimum in the populated Barnett is 50 feet. Cities can establish setback rules if they wish.

Denton had passed a **1,200-foot setback** seven months before the rigs came to Bush's neighborhood. But operator EagleRidge Energy contended that it was grandfathered under older rules, and Denton officials said **their hands were tied**. EagleRidge, which didn't respond to calls seeking comment for this story, moved ahead.

Residents who'd pushed for the bigger setback now consider it toothless because so much of the city had already been permitted for wells. They said they saw only one option left. They gathered signatures **to force a vote on a fracking ban**.

Locals and the activists who helped them were outspent nearly 10 to 1 by the industry, but the ban passed by a wide margin last month — 59 percent to 41 percent.

That made Denton the first Texas city with such a ban. The lawsuits hit the next morning.

One came from the **Texas Oil & Gas Association**, which argued that the rule unconstitutionally treads on regulatory ground reserved for the state. The ban would effectively stop drilling in Denton because Barnett wells aren't economical without fracking, the trade group said.

The **other suit** targeting the ban was filed by a state agency, the Texas General Land Office.

"If it were allowed to be enforced it would hurt the schoolchildren of Texas, who earn hundreds of millions of dollars a year on oil and gas production on Permanent School Fund lands," Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson said in a statement.

Some state legislators have suggested they'll seek a law to ban such bans. But Denton Councilman Kevin Roden has called on legislators to treat the vote as a different sort of wake-up call.

He'd like cities to get a share of the production taxes now flowing to the state, and he wants locals to have more regulatory authority, such as the explicit ability to limit gas development to industrial areas. Otherwise, he said, legislators risk "turning the hearts of your citizens away from this industry."

Trying to get out, and already gone

Rebecca Williams' health began its U-turn from good to bad last year. Her husband's followed a few months later. Some of their problems are identical: migraines, respiratory problems, nosebleeds, vomiting, forgetfulness, rashes. One of their dogs gets rashes, too.

"I try not to go outside of my house."



"I try not to go outside of my house, because when I do, I get sick," said Williams, 45, who lives northwest of Fort Worth just outside Azle, near a compressor station and heavy gas-well development.

She's had pneumonia three times within the last year and a half, despite a vaccination against it, and twice her lips and fingers turned blue. The last time, suspecting the pneumonia was chemically induced, she thought to ask whether her white blood cell count indicated a viral or bacterial cause. Neither, her doctor said.

In addition to pneumonia, she's had one respiratory infection after another. Antibiotics don't seem to help. She's had to get a nebulizer, which turns medication into a mist to be inhaled.

Williams is a nurse who works for a health insurer, reviewing multiple cases a day, and said she's seeing certain diseases increase in gas-well-intensive areas. Leukemia, heart attacks among people in their 30s and 40s, respiratory illnesses, certain autoimmune disorders.

"Something's not right," she said.

She wants to sell her spacious house and get out, but it was on the market for more than six months this year with no offers. She plans to cut the price substantially and try again.



After developing health problems, including rashes, that she attributes to nearby gas sites, Rebecca Williams wants to sell her house outside of Fort Worth. Eleanor Bell/Center for Public Integrity

Jana DeGrand did move — after her gallbladder attached itself to her small intestine, after the appendix her surgeon described as “obliterated” was removed, after her heart attack at age 50. She moved from her town straight off the shale.

DeGrand lived in Argyle, about a mile from the Ishees. She was fine until late 2007, after several years of drilling.

“It kind of snowballed after that — lots of things that the doctors were scratching their heads [over], saying, ‘We don’t know why,’” said DeGrand, now 53.

Only two TCEQ air samples were taken near her during the years her health worsened, neither on her property. Both tests picked up chemicals with known cardiovascular and gastrointestinal effects, though in very low concentrations.

Like Taylor Ishee, DeGrand lived near numerous wells. For several months a sludge pit for a well pad that residents ultimately fought off sat 100 feet from her back fence, filled with an oily substance that smelled like diesel. And she was about two miles north of the Argyle Central Facility, a compressor station built in 2010 that people nearby repeatedly complained about.

Compressors push gas along pipelines to keep it flowing. Emissions ranging from methane to volatile organic compounds can come from multiple sources on site: the compressor engines, the dehydration units removing water from the gas, the tanks holding that waste.

The Argyle Central Facility, surrounded by homes, had all that equipment — four engines, a dehydrator and 19 tanks at the time it was built.

It falls into a regulatory category called “permit by rule.” If operators estimate their facility’s emissions will fall under a certain level — including no more

then facility's emissions will fall under a certain level — including no more than 25 tons per year of volatile organic compounds and some other types of air contaminants — they can simply get cracking. Registration is required in some cases but not all.

When the TCEQ did a one-time tally of Barnett compressors and equipment authorized under that rule and similar ones in 2009, they topped 8,600.

No other oil or gas site in Denton County received as many air complaints in the last five years as the Argyle Central Facility, according to the Center's analysis. None of the 63 complaints prompted the TCEQ to issue a violation notice.

But the EPA did so in 2011 after inspecting the site. Investigators found five tank hatches releasing methane, which the EPA described as "an extremely hazardous substance." (It's a flammable and potent greenhouse gas, though the operator said the amount released was so minor that it posed no danger.)

Separately in 2011, the facility's operators documented 510 "blowdowns," the venting of gas and potentially dangerous chemicals. Forty-five percent of those events happened in the lead-up to the day that March that DeGrand collapsed in her garage, face numb, heart no longer functioning properly. Whether one had any connection to the other, DeGrand can't know, but she'll always wonder.

The operator at the time, a subsidiary of energy firm Williams Cos., estimated that the 2011 blowdowns emitted a total of 43,000 pounds of gas and 43 pounds of volatile organic compounds, known as VOCs. That's well below permit-by-rule limits and didn't constitute a violation, the TCEQ said. All told, the company emitted about 6.3 tons of VOCs that year, the agency said.

Tom Droege, a spokesman for Williams, which no longer owns the facility, attributed many of the complaints to the high level of activity on the site during

construction. Of the blowdown emissions, he said, "residents would likely get more of an exposure from VOCs by living close to any of the local highways."

Without clear information on what she was breathing, DeGrand can only say how she felt while she lived in Argyle. And what happened after she moved north of the Barnett in July.

"Time will tell how lasting and permanent the effects are, but I do know I'm better since I got out of there," she said. "I know several people who've left. They all got better."

Jim Morris of the Center for Public Integrity and Lisa Song and David Hasemyer of InsideClimate News contributed to this article.

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Kim Triolo Feil - Works at Anti-Urban Drilling Specialist

Thank you for publishing this thorough article...now folks reading this and in Arlington (also ground zero for Uran Drilling) need to hammer our City Health Officer for refusing to respond to health related concerns & questions please email her and the city manager cynthia.simmons@arlingtontx.gov, trej.yelverton@arlingtontx.gov

Like Reply Dec 11, 2014 6:57am Edited



Glen Etzkorn Cobden, Illinois

Seize the assets of all tractors and their political cronies, place them in prison and charge them with murder of innocent Americans.

Like Reply 2 · Dec 11, 2014 8:04am



Daniel Ferris Salesman and Electrician at Emergency Solar at Small Business Owner

We need to Ban Fracking and implement sustainable Energy Policies.

A California Residential Feed in Tariff would allow homeowners to sell their Renewable Energy to the utility, protecting our communities from Poison Water, Grid Failures, Natural Disasters, Toxic Natural Gas and Oil Fracking. It would also create a new revenue stream for the Hard Working Taxpaying, Voting, Homeowner.

Sign and Share this petition for a California Residential Feed in Tariff.
<http://signon.org/sign/let-california-home-owners>

We need a National Feed in Tariff, this petition starts in California.

California cur... See More

Like Reply 1 · Dec 11, 2014 8:24am



Westchester Gazette

One request: Please don't look to Chris Faulkner for an "expert" opinion about any of this. He has a very specific mindset and it's all very predictable. Dubbing himself as "The Frack Master" is about as obvious as anyone can be. Placing these operations inside our neighborhoods and up against our fence-lines is one of the biggest environmental disasters in history. Our country was led astray by all of it and will continue to be as long as we don't have the systems in place and permanent monitors for these operations that will prove once and for all the disaster it is.

Like Reply 0 · Dec 11, 2014 10:48am

bkrd1

Yes kids in your great work. Everyone needs to make sure everyone they know takes the time to read something that is so vital.

We will not hear this on the main media networks. They are entertainment now and no longer to be trusted to inform us with information vital to our very lives.

We all know this is happening in every GOP controlled state and it is at the Kochs orders and all the other sociopaths who worship only money and power. This is now what our future will be in every state if the politicians go along, and they are. If the people don't stand up, while they still can that is, when the hell are we?

Perhaps we should force the CEO and his family to live in the closest place to the well while it is in operation. It would be mandatory.

Like Reply 0 · Dec 11, 2014 6:24pm



Rebecca Leblanc

Thank you for taking the time to tell our stories . or shall I say our nightmares. The article was beautifully written and hopefully will get the word out to those not yet affected so they can fight to stay unaffected.

Like · Reply · Dec 12, 2014 6:37am



scottie1620

The TCEQ's Clawson said the method the agency uses to set exposure guidelines went through two rounds of peer review and "multiple rounds of public comments."

While TCEQ may have conducted "multiple rounds of public comments" the one thing it did not do was give any consideration at all to those public comments. TCEQ is a farce and a sell-out to the oil and gas industry. TCEQ has no will or determination to protect citizens. Instead, it protect the oil and gas industry from having to answer and pay for the damage it does to people.

Like · Reply · Dec 12, 2014 7:01am



Jean Dowell · Cincinnati

This is a thorough article that leaves no doubt of the harmful effects of Fracking. And it leaves no doubt no one is looking after the people.

Like · Reply · Dec 12, 2014 5:23pm



Victor Mikov · Cornell University

10 Reasons for Opposing Hydraulic Fracturing or "Fracking," including Both the Exploration and Extraction of Shale Gas:

- 1) Poisons irreversibly lands and waters with large parameters with hundreds of carcinogenic and highly toxic chemicals;
- 2) Harms people's health, including that of workers at drilling sites, due to excessive concentrations of silica and fracking well explosions and fires;
- 3) Causes earthquakes;
- 4) Consumes vast quantities of water;
- 5) Requires tremendous areas of land for drilling, gas pipes, roads, parking lots, and equipment;
- 6) Harms the economy both at local and national... See More

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David Marinsik · Santa Rosa, California

Republicans, now their murdering the general public. For oil.

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