

Pavillion-area resident had entered agreement with EnCana

## Water deliveries will stop

By DUSTIN BLEIZEFFER Star-Tribune energy reporter | Posted: Thursday, September 10, 2009 7:45 pm

A Pavillion-area resident says he's been put on notice by EnCana Oil & Gas USA that it will cease delivering drinking water to his home on Monday.

Louis Meeks, and several of his neighbors, for years have suspected their drinking water wells might be contaminated from deep natural gas wells interspersed throughout the rural ranching and farming community in Fremont County.

"I have a hot-water heater to heat my home, so if they take my water I won't have no heat for our house. We can't use our toilets, can't bathe or nothing," Meeks said.

EnCana contends that after multiple rounds of testing and several years of analysis, there's been no evidence that the residential water wells pose a health risk or that its oil and gas activities are to blame for any contamination. In fact, after bringing a lawsuit against EnCana, Meeks entered into a mediation agreement in which EnCana would deliver drinking water to his home.

EnCana spokesman Randy Teeuwen said the agreement also stipulated that EnCana could cease providing drinking water on Sept. 15, 2009.

"That was the date set to give Meeks time to decide what to do about water," Teeuwen said. "This was a mediated resolution that Mr. Meeks and his lawyers agreed to -- both parties agreed to."

Meeks contends there was no set date to cease the water service. The Star-Tribune has requested a copy of the agreement, but was unable to obtain any documentation before deadline Thursday evening.

Meanwhile, the drinking water concern in Pavillion has attracted national attention in a movement to restrict the oil and gas industry's practice of hydraulic fracturing. Hydraulic fracturing is the process of pumping fluids -- sometimes oil and diesel -- under extremely high pressure in order to crack gas-bearing rock deep below the surface.

"Fracking" and other advanced drilling and well-stimulation technologies are credited for boosting the nation's technically recoverable natural gas reserve by more than 35 percent in just two years. But others see it as a threat to water resources, and particularly a threat to human health in areas where there are drinking water wells.

In fact, legislation has been introduced in Congress to bring hydraulic fracturing under the federal authority of the Clean Drinking Water Act.

"How come everybody started having problems out here when they started drilling?" Meeks said. "I had good water for 30 years."

This year the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency conducted its own initial testing of some 40 drinking water wells in the Pavillion area in response to citizens' concerns. The tests indicated some "tentatively identified compounds" in a handful of wells, but more testing and analysis needs to be performed to know if any of the wells present a health risk, according to Luke Chavez of the EPA's Region 8 office in Denver.

Further analysis and testing is under way.

"We've been supplying water to Mr. Meeks for several years and we have been doing it as no obligation, just because we want to be a good neighbor while still working on trying to figure out what was wrong with his well," Teeuwen said. "Over the course of all these years there's been eight rounds of testing out there, and there has never been anything that could conclusively tie our activities with what's in his water well."

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