



Peter N. Skinner P.E.

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Mr. Walter Hang
Toxics Targeting Inc.
215 N. Cayuga Street
Ithaca, NY 14850

Re: Levant Area Gas Well Leaks

Dear Mr. Hang:

It has come to my attention that the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation has published a Final SGEIS (Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement) with respect to policy issues surrounding the choices to permit high volume well fracturing for extraction of oil and gas products. One reference in that document needs clarification – namely that the soil gas releases observed at the Short residence in Levant, NY had origins in deep strata, not a wetland across the road from the Short house.

I served as the NYS Attorney General's environmental science team supervisor in the Albany office. I had served in that office from 1970 and often received calls from the public about a wide spectrum of health and environmental problems that citizens encountered in their lives. I and my staff would investigate these complaints and often recommend that our office take appropriate actions to rectify the problem. Over 33 years of work in this office I was often called upon to investigate the engineering explanations for many serious hydro-geologic, mining and energy difficulties including the Love Canal Case, radioactive specie leakage from the West Valley Nuclear Fuels complex, the Akzo Mine collapse, a catastrophic water well blowout and several nuclear plant accidents to name just a few related investigations.

One such complaint arrived by telephone from Mrs. Deborah Short of Levant, a small town south of Buffalo. She recounted a tale of serious gas related problems that included flames in the sink and washing machine, an explosion that caused her outdoor well cover to fly far from its location and high concentrations of gas in her basement – high enough to reach 80% of the lower explosive level on a gage that they had installed. I was quite surprised and suggested that she consider moving out of her house until these levels of gas receded to safer levels and we investigated the source(s) of this gas condition. Subsequent to our conversation she and her husband and sons did move out of their house.

I flew out to their house soon after the call and confirmed that elevated gas conditions existed on and around their property. I also suggested that inadequately sealed gas wells could allow pressurized

flammable gas to escape and permeate the soils nearby, traveling in the subsurface to the degree the soil and geology permitted. After my visit, Attorney General Robert Abrams himself visited the site and met with local citizens concerned about environmental and health hazards of petroleum drilling in the area.

Because the Shorts lived on a limited budget, the costs of living away from their home had serious financial repercussions. Since the gas leaks could not be located and resolved quickly, I helped organize a volunteer basement lining and subsurface gas extraction system effort for their house so that they might resume living there safely.

I recollect that members of the NYS DEC staff had suggested that this gas problem could be traced to a wetland area some distance from the Short's house. Most people found this assertion to be absurd but other substantial prosecutions at the time (including the Love Canal case) precluded an AG's own comprehensive investigation.

Months later, I learned that the staff from the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation intended to capture gas samples from the wetland. I joined the DEC staff and together we cut holes in the ice and with Tedlar bags attempted to procure samples of gas coming out of the hole. I saw no evidence of gas emanations. I suggested that we capture gas samples from the Short property. I forget where these samples were captured but I sent the bags into an outside lab for at least methane analysis.

A few days later, I received an anonymous call from a citizen who suggested that I ask the lab to test the samples for Carbon 14 emissions. He explained that gas from the wetland would feature such emissions while gas from deep geologic formations would have little or none. After this call, I added carbon 14 to the list of analytes.

When I called the laboratory about a week later, I asked the technician for results. He told me that the gas sample from the Short residence was "dead as a stone" which was short hand for an observation that gas from the Short residence probably originated from deeper strata penetrated by gas wells in the area, certainly not from the wetland. I immediately called NYS DEC Assistant Commissioner of Minerals, Greg Sovas, and told him of these findings.

Based upon this conclusive evidence, I assumed that NYS DEC would take the necessary steps to identify the offending well(s) and order proper reconstruction. DEC never shared any further information about the problem and its remediation with me although I recollect that the annuli in some wells nearby were depressurized and that the soil gas problems subsided.

I believe that the carbon 14 findings discussed above conclusively debunked the assertion that gas at the Short residence originated from the wetland near their house. I believe that the drilled well gas releases experience in Levant area of western New York exemplify some of the difficulties that can result from drilling practices similar to those employed in the high volume well fracturing process.

Sincerely yours,



Peter Skinner P.E.

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