

Search 

GO



[Mining Reform](#) [Int'l Mining](#) [Oil and Gas](#) [Press Room](#) [Issues](#) [Publications](#) [About Us](#) [EARTHblog](#) [Places and Projects](#)

## ISSUES

- [Abandoned Mines](#)
- [Acid Mine Drainage](#)
- [Health and Toxics in Colorado](#)
- [Health Concerns](#)
- [Contamination incidents](#)
- [Regulatory gaps](#)
- [Environmental Monitoring](#)
- [Health and Toxics in NM](#)
- [Hydraulic Fracturing](#)
- [Marcellus Shale](#)
- [Millsite Claims](#)
- [Mercury](#)
- [Oil and Gas Air Pollution](#)
- [Oil and Gas Health Effects](#)
- [Oil and Gas Landowner Support](#)
- [Oil and Gas Leasing](#)
- [Oil and Gas Noise](#)
- [Oil and Gas Pollution](#)
- [Oil and Gas Waste Disposal](#)
- [Stock Raising Homestead Act of 1916 \(SRHA\)](#)
- [TRI](#)

## TAKE ACTION

## SUPPORT EARTHWORKS

## CAMPAIGNS



## HEALTH CONCERNS IN COLORADO'S OIL AND GAS FIELDS

There are an increasing number of oil- and gas-field residents who believe that the industry is causing or exacerbating their health problems. Some of their stories are captured in the excerpts from new articles below. Links to other stories can be found in the "For More Information" section at the bottom of this page.

### Colorado Oil and Gas Health and Toxics: In the News

- [Voices from the gas fields](#), Orion Magazine, Nov/Dec. 2006
- [Collateral damage](#), *Aspen Times*, Dec. 3, 2006
- [Oil and Gas Drilling Raise Health Concerns in Garfield County](#), *Summit Daily News*, Oct. 22, 2006.
- [Health is a casualty of drilling](#), Op Ed. *Denver Post*, June 18, 2006
- [Something in the air?](#) *Aspen Daily News*, May 3, 2006
- [Tempers flare over Barrett pit fires](#), *Glenwood Springs Post Independent*, December 29, 2005
- [Families fume about gas leaks near Trinidad](#), *Pueblo Chieftan*, July 17, 2005
- [State OKs study of gas development on health](#), *Glenwood Springs Post Independent*, July 12, 2005
- [GarCo gas critic takes case to DC](#), *Aspen Daily News*, April 22, 2005
- [Homeowners lament downside of wells](#), *Grand Junction Daily Sentinel*, April 18, 2005
- [Oil and water make for shaky mix](#), *Durango Telegraph*, March 24, 2005
- [Unused well eyed as cause of home blast](#), *Durango Herald*, February 15, 2005
- [Paradox natural gas rig vents toxic fumes](#), *Telluride Daily Planet*, January 19, 2005
- [Toxic bubbles trouble Silt](#), *Rocky Mountain News*, April 13, 2004

### Excerpts from the articles

**'Collateral damage' - Residents fear murky effects of energy boom**  
*Aspen Times*. December 3, 2006, Judith Kohler (The Associated Press)

Chris Mobaldi is 59, but looks at least 70. In the last decade, she has had two tumors removed from her pituitary gland and endured excruciating pain. . . .The Mobaldis believe her neurological system was damaged by drinking water that may have been contaminated by drilling fluids from wells around their former home about 60 miles to the east in Rifle.

. . . Other residents near the epicenter of the Rockies' energy boom are starting to worry about their health, too, and who, exactly, is looking out for them. The federal government leaves much of the regulation up to state officials - and in Colorado, some residents fear there isn't nearly enough oversight to keep them safe.

"We're collateral damage out here," said Bill Solinger, whose family has had respiratory problems, headaches and fatigue since gas drilling exploded in the Rifle area.

**Oil and Gas Drilling Raise Health Concerns in Garfield County**  
*Summit Daily News*, Oct. 22, 2006, Associated Press

SILT - As they drove home from Rifle after an area natural-gas operator was presented a good-corporate-citizen award recently, Carol and Orlyn Bell encountered a "terrible" smell when they neared their Dry Hollow ranch, south of Silt. "It was the strongest odor we've smelled in the last four years," Carol Bell said. The Bells said the odor came from nearby gas wells and production facilities, something they've seen surround their 110-acre ranch in those four years.

Odor complaints and air pollution concerns are on the rise in Garfield County, where longtime residents often wake up to hazy skies in the Colorado River valley. Many believe the gas industry is responsible, and figures from the Colorado Air Quality Control Commission may back up that claim.

**Health is a casualty of gas drilling** (Op Ed.)  
*Denver Post*. June 18, 2006, Rebecca Clarren

- Veteran oil and gas lawyer Lance Astrella of Denver, who has built a career fighting the industry on behalf of citizens, says he has talked with dozens of people who blame their



## AFFILIATES

Alaskans for Responsible Mining



Ethical Metalsmiths



Great Basin Resource Watch

## PARTNERS



Bikes for the World



Center for Science in Public Participation



SkyTruth

health problems on the surge of new gas wells.

- Between January and March of this year, eight people called the Garfield County oil and gas department to complain about air quality. They asked about black smoke and strong chemical odors that they worried could make them sick. [Read more about similar complaints filed with the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission.](#)

### Something in the air?

*Aspen Daily News*, May 3, 2006, David Frey

Throughout the gas fields of western Garfield County, dozens of residents have complained of health problems they believe are caused by the wells that have spread across the rolling sagebrush landscape. Complaints include dizziness, nausea, difficulty breathing, sinus problems, eye and skin irritation and blistering. More severe concerns have included cancer, neurological disorders and acute chemical sensitivities.

- Chris Mobaldi felt burning pains across her body for months, worsening until she could no longer dress herself. She became weak, chronically nauseous and developed a string of debilitating health problems culminating in a pair of pituitary gland tumors. In two years, friends said she aged 20 years. Most puzzling, a rare brain condition called foreign accent syndrome has left her speech sounding like she's from another country, or sometimes reduced to total gibberish. She said she had smelled fumes from the surrounding gas wells for months and complained of tainted well water.
- Karen Trulove began complaining of constant fatigue at her home south of Silt, and closed up her framing shop in town when she could no longer go to work. On the well pad above her home, a petroleum smell still fills the air, and on bad days she says the air around their home shares the same odor, accumulating in gullies and valleys on her land. . . Among her neighbors south of Silt, Karen Trulove counts a half-dozen who have removed the batteries from their smoke alarms after they tired of hearing them mysteriously activated. She believes they were tripped by unseen chemicals in the air.
- Dee Hoffmeister said the constant rumbling of diesel engines at a well site near her home south of Silt filled her home with fumes. She returned from a month-long family visit to find a gray cloud filling her front porch, she said, and the fumes caused her to pass out.

### Tempers flare over Barrett pit fires

*Glenwood Springs Post Independent*, December 29, 2005, Dennis Webb

The peace and quiet of Beth Dardynski's Christmas Eve was rocked Saturday by one of several burns conducted by Bill Barrett Corp. to deal with problems in natural gas well pits south of Silt. . . Barrett representatives and industry regulators say while the practice has short-term impacts, it will end a longer-running problem of odors associated with buildup of petroleum condensates in pits.

- Dardynski said the smell has been bad in her neighborhood, and has made people sick. But she also worries about the health effects of breathing smoke from the burns.

### Families fume about gas leaks near Trinidad

*The Pueblo Chieftain*, July 17, 2005, Mike Garrett

Raton Basin landowners charge that their water wells are being polluted by seeping methane gas from coal-seam outcrops. The ranchers also complain their crop fields and yards are becoming "hot spots" of accumulating gas.

- Irma Mondragon, whose son George lives next door, said her lawn just off Colorado 12 "now looks terrible with weeds coming up and everything dying. And we've always had terrible smells even after we cleaned our cesspool." She has concluded methane gas must be seeping into her water well and trailer home since she and her late husband didn't start smelling anything different until the gas industry started drilling activities in the area around 1994-95. "We were getting that smell and having to clean the cesspool all the time because we thought it was that gas," she said. "It has progressively gotten worse. I'm sure that's the smell that's coming up my pipes, especially in the kitchen. I've used a lot of stuff to put in the pipes and it doesn't seem to help."

### State OKs study of gas development on health

*Glenwood Springs Post Independent*, July 12, 2005, Dennis Webb

A state panel Monday approved a \$65,000 study to assess the possible effects of natural-gas development on human health in Garfield County. The Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission gave its consent after hearing further complaints by local residents about illnesses they say have resulted from energy-industry activity.

- Susan Haire, who lives on Morrisania Mesa near Battlement Mesa, said she has become ill this year since doing irrigation work near a Williams Production gas well. She has dealt with itching of her eyes and face, coughing, leg nerve inflammation that has hindered her ability to walk and other symptoms, many of which have occurred only when she has been near the well, she said. On June 24 she experienced an "extreme exposure" to gases at the well, and suffered a blinding headache, she said. "I don't know what happened at that well. All I know is how sick I am," she said.
- [Read the entire article.](#)

**GarCo gas critic takes case to DC**

*Aspen Daily News*, April 22, 2005, David Frey

Laura Amos plans to meet with legislators this week to urge the Environmental Protection Agency to regulate chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing under the Safe Drinking Water Act.

- Amos believes fracking on a nearby EnCana Oil & Gas well disrupted her water well, sending a plume of water in the air and allowing industrial chemicals to enter her drinking water. Amos since suffered a rare adrenal tumor, which she believes was caused by 2-BE, a chemical used in fracking. EnCana officials initially denied the chemical was used, but later admitted it had been. [Colorado Oil & Gas Conservation Commission] COGCC officials said if Amos contacted 2-BE, it might have come from household cleaners like Windex.
- Read [Laura Amos' story](#)

**Homeowners lament downside of wells**

*Grand Junction Daily Sentinel*, April 18, 2005, Sally Spaulding

- Garland Anderson is afraid to have his home appraised. The retiree who moved to Grass Mesa so he could live next to Bambi is now the neighbor of a swath of natural-gas wells. "I had no idea what it would mean when it all began," Anderson said. "It's dust, noise, smells, gases that leak out, major concerns about water quality and chemicals in the ground."
- Carol Bell said three chemical spills have happened on her property in the last year and a half, with more than 2,000 gallons of diesel fuel emptying onto the property.
- Nancy Pitman has lived on Hunter Mesa south of Rifle all her life. The fourth-generation resident on the land now has eight well pads on her property with dozens of wells. "The smell of the open pits they sometimes use is horrible and so bad it makes me sick to my stomach," she said.

**Oil and water make for shaky mix**

*Durango Telegraph*, March 24, 2005, Will Sands

- Jake Hottle has been dealing with tainted drinking water for several decades. Hottle was born and raised on a farm located on the lower Animas River and remembers having clean well water as a child. However, that changed when oil and gas drilling began in the Animas River corridor in the 1950s. Hottle says he clearly recalls his mother struggling to drink water that carried a heavy, overpowering odor throughout the 1960s. He also clearly remembers her premature passing at the age of 64 from cancer. His personal experiences and those of his neighbors led him to form the Cedar Hill Clean Water Coalition. Through investigations, the coalition steadily found poorly cemented wells and open-pit dumping as well as methane gas in 40 percent of the water wells tested. "After a long struggle, the industry finally went back in and properly cemented their wells, and they started lining their pits," Hottle said. While proper cementing and pit lining are now mandated practices, Hottle and many others argue that the industry needs to try still harder.

**Unused well eyed as cause of home blast**

*Durango Herald*, February 15, 2005, Shane Benjamin

A gas well with a long history of leaking methane and fouling ground water in Bondad is being studied as a possible cause for a double-wide trailer exploding last weekend. Gas leaking from the well has contaminated shallow ground formations and groundwater in Bondad, Bell said. The commission spent about \$200,000 trying to plug the well in the early 1990s and again in 1994.

- A 70-year-old man in the home was severely burned, according to a neighbor who called 911. His hair was singed off and his clothes were burned to his body, the neighbor said.

**Paradox natural gas rig vents toxic fumes**

*Telluride Daily Planet*, Wednesday, January 19, 2005, D. Dion

- Tommy Boylan said the sulphur smell was pungent as he dismantled the barn, which was less than a mile from the drilling rig in Paradox Valley, near Bedrock, Colorado. He was at the site for less than 45 minutes, he said, but as he was leaving he felt a burning sensation between his nose and mouth, and in his lungs. The nosebleed he developed that evening lasted about an hour, longer than the time he had spent being exposed to hydrogen sulfide, a highly toxic gas present in natural gas. "My lungs still hurt, and this happened to me in December."
- "It wasn't until after Boylan revisited the site, and experienced a second severe nosebleed, that he learned about the medical condition of Doris Van Ness, another Paradox resident who lives near the rig. Van Ness was treated for exposure to hydrogen sulfide. "That's when I started to really get alarmed," said Boylan.
- "State regulators only learned of the venting of the toxic gas on Dec. 17, according to Morris Bell of the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC). Bell said that regulators received complaints from "several individuals" about irritated eyes, nosebleeds and respiratory difficulties.

**Toxic bubbles trouble Silt**

*Rocky Mountain News*, April 13, 2004, Gargi Chakrabarty

Residents of Silt began drinking bottled water last Wednesday after natural gas seeped into a nearby

creek, and possibly into their wells. The seep was first noticed by residents who reported seeing bubbles welling up in Divide Creek on March 31. The next day, EnCana and state officials confirmed it was natural gas. Benzene, a carcinogen, was found in Divide Creek when a water sample was tested April 1. The result showed its level at 99 micrograms per liter, about 80 times higher than the safe drinking water level of 1.2 micrograms per liter.

- Property owner Bracken has asked EnCana to install a big tank on her 60-acre property to store the drinking water. "Ever since the seep, we haven't noticed any fish in the creek," Bracken said. "Even a beaver family has left; we have not seen any dead wildlife, just no wildlife."

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

#### Other stories on potential health impacts related to oil and gas development:

- [Read about how Laura Amos and her family's water well was contaminated after hydraulic fracturing of a well near their Colorado home](#)
- [Drilling fluids seep from pit and taint Colorado landowner's drinking water](#)
- [Condensate pit odors and fires affect Colorado residents](#)
- [U.S. Oil and Gas Health And Toxics: In the News](#)
- [Alabama family suspects health problems linked to coalbed methane hydraulic fracturing of coalbed methane wells](#)

#### Related OGAP web pages

- [Chemicals used during oil and gas drilling and production in Colorado](#) (Report by The Endocrine Disruption Exchange, Inc.)
- [Oil and gas industry information on the use of toxic chemicals during drilling and production](#)
- [News stories on oil and gas pollution issues in Colorado](#)

#### Other Web Sites

*Orion Magazine* November/December 2006 feature on "[Voices from the Gas Fields](#)" of Colorado. This article features stories of the impacts being felt by residents in Garfield County, Colorado. There are also [audio and video clips](#) with additional stories, and information on issues related to oil and gas and health.

EARTHWORKS | 1612 K St., NW, Suite 808 | Washington, D.C., USA 20006  
202.887.1872 | [info@earthworksaction.org](mailto:info@earthworksaction.org) | [Privacy Policy](#)