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Researchers: “No Link” between Fracking And Methane in North Texas Groundwater

Water wells with high levels of methane can be at risk of exploding, but researchers who looked at the issue in the Dallas-Fort Worth area say fracking isn’t to blame.

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Researchers at the University of Texas say there’s “no link” between natural gas fracking and elevated levels of methane found in some North Texas water wells.

An August study in the journal *Water Resources Research* looked at groundwater sources across the Barnett Shale natural gas field in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

Of the more than 450 water wells sampled in the area, researchers say the “vast majority” contained little or no methane. But a “cluster” of 11 wells near the line between Parker and Hood counties had much higher levels: more than 10 milligrams of methane per liter of water.

At that level, the university says, methane – a type of natural gas – could have to be vented from the wells to “ensure the flammable gas does not accumulate to hazardous levels.”

“There’s an explosive hazard, that’s the major concern,” says Toti Larson, the lead author on the study.

The study concluded the methane had gotten into those 11 wells by naturally migrating upward from deeper rock formations over millions of years.

“And, so, our findings suggest that the natural gas in those shallow wells is not the result of fracking,” Larson says.

The August study was the last in a series of similar research efforts, and the university says the findings and conclusions have “remained consistent” throughout.

Still, the research isn’t likely to put an end to concerns about drilling’s effects on drinking water.

Larson says the latest study doesn’t rule out the possibility of isolated contamination from hydraulic fracturing, and separate research from Stanford University has found evidence of that

happening in Pennsylvania and North Texas. In those instances, researchers pointed to faulty industry infrastructure and gas leaks as the culprits.

The Stanford research didn't sway Texas oil and gas regulators when it was released: the Texas Railroad Commission dismissed the 2014 study as not rigorous enough.

In describing the latest study, the University of Texas disclosed that its research is at times funded by oil and gas companies, and that it also receives revenue from oil and gas royalties in the Barnett Shale, the study area. However, the university said that no "sponsored research" funded by industry has covered the specific issue of methane in groundwater.