

July 13, 2015 - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VOICES of St Tammany: Against Fracking

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"NEED FOR IMMEDIATE TESTING OF ST TAMMANY'S WATER SUPPLIES"

Our proposition is that existing MUNICIPAL WELLS in St Tammany be tested immediately; there are over 300 such wells, so a 10% pool of about 30 wells should be able to cover the parish's vulnerable water supplies. Wells should be chosen to provide thorough coverage of the area of the parish as well as variations in depth - shallow, medium & deep.

Because U.S. cities/towns/counties had not tested for these toxins beforehand, as many of the toxins are not "naturally occurring," the citizens' representatives are not able to prove in court that the chemicals were not in the waters before fracking. This oversight allows fracking interests to claim that the courts have not found them responsible for poisoning waters.

We want to change the playing field and make it level.

We are providing a list of known toxins that have been discovered - after the fact/frack - in other areas where fracking is taking place, including the Haynesville Shale of northwestern Louisiana. Our list of chemicals was developed by Wilma Subra of Subra Company, a highly regarded environmental scientist, consultant and lecturer on the health effects of fracking. These toxins have been found in wells in fracked areas across the U.S.

Additionally, the St Tammany Parish Council should request that DEQ provide a list of chemicals that they have found in Haynesville Shale field tests and add any that are not already on the list. Testing has been done in that area extensively for many years due to the Wilcox aquifer collapse - which was caused by a natural gas well blowout in the 1990s. The area has since been decimated by horizontal hydraulic fracturing with no regard for the leakage of chemicals into that aquifer. The Wilcox aquifer is contaminated with many of the chemicals on this list.

Helis should cover the costs of testing - but NOT own it or perform the testing. An independent lab such as PACE should provide the testing and the results should come directly to the Parish, not via Helis. In a recent EPA study done on the effects of fracking on groundwaters, one of the reasons given for the incomplete results was that energy companies did not always willingly provide the EPA with requested data on well tests.

A rough estimate of the cost per well is between \$1,200 and \$2,000; that's \$36,000 to \$60,000 per set of tests (30 wells). That's about one Christmas bonus for a middle-level manager in the energy business. These tests should be repeated at least twice yearly if drilling and fracking activities continue, although quarterly would be better. Quarterly tests at the \$2,000 price would equal about a quarter of a million per year - a pittance to companies that see net profits (not gross) in the billions each year.

This is by no means a sanction of fracking, nor does the testing in any way provide a guarantee of future approvals or authorization of fracking in St Tammany. It simply allows the Parish to go forth knowing that there is a baseline of water quality established, and that if in the future fracking does come to St Tammany, then we have a way to guarantee that the courts will not be able to deny the culpability of Helis or other energy companies in the poisoning of the Southern Hills Aquifer.

If Helis and future drillers, who will also be required to contribute to the ongoing water testing , are dissuaded from coming to St Tammany because of the need to pay for this program, that would seem to prove that they are aware that they are potentially responsible for the destruction of our drinking water supply.

This testing program needs to continue for at least twenty years AFTER all wells are plugged and abandoned, since the toxins still remain in the drilled and fracked areas, and in fact, are more likely to migrate into the water supply as the well casings disintegrate and leak toxins into the substrata. Fifty years would be even more effective, as cancers, miscarriages and stillborns, liver, lungs and heart damage will continue to accelerate as the toxins permeate the aquifer.

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