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Politely spurn fracking, mom urges Yukoners

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Fracking: 'Don't make a hasty decision'

By **AINSLIE CRUICKSHANK**
Star Reporter

"Courteously decline."

"Give it another 10 years ... there's a huge surplus in the system right now, so just sit on it for a little while, just sit and wait and see where we are impact-wise in another 10 years."

Diana Daunheimer, an organic farmer and a mother of two, lives just west of Didsbury, Alta. on an 11-acre parcel of land.

There are six shale gas wells surrounding her property, not more than 500 metres away.

The first one was drilled in 2008, the last one just last year.

Her 10-year-old daughter was diagnosed with a benign but locally invasive tumor in her neck, when she was seven, and her six-year-old son suffers from chronic respiratory difficulties.

And now she's warning Yukoners: "Don't make a hasty decision."

Daunheimer met with the Select Committee Regarding the Risks and Benefits of Hydraulic Fracturing during its fact-finding mission to Alberta last month.

She shared her experience living in close proximity to hydraulic fracturing wells, and offered the same cautions she's giving to all Yukoners now.

"Wait and see the fallout from what's happening in the United States and what's going to happen south of



IDYLLIC LIFESTYLE – Diana Daunheimer and her family of four are organic farmers in Didsbury, Alta. The photo above is of their house. What are not shown are the six hydraulic fracturing wells on neighbouring properties, not 500 metres from their home.

you folks, and then if you still feel it's an economically wise decision, then look at it," she said.

Daunheimer can speak freely about her experience because none of the energy projects are on her property so she's not subject to a non-disclosure agreement.

Earlier this week, she shared some of the most significant impacts her family has dealt with, things like poor air quality, contamination of water wells, light pollution, traffic and surface contamination.

In 2010, a sour crude well was drilled 300 metres south of her home.

The company did what's called a propane fracture, she said, which uses

a propane gel rather than a water based fracture fluid.

The company then did a well test and flaring that lasted for 19 days.

That well continued to vent sour gas for three years, unbeknownst to the family.

It wasn't long after the construction of the sour crude well that Daunheimer's daughter developed the tumor in her neck.

The family didn't know about the level of carcinogenic material they were being exposed to, so it wasn't considered during her diagnosis.

Now that she knows, however, Daunheimer has made appointments with a pediatric toxicologist for both

her children, and has a few doctors lined up who are willing to review her daughter's case.

"But the medical community is very reluctant to draw those lines," Daunheimer said.

"Sulfur dioxide is known to cause the type of respiratory difficulties that we've been having, irritation, lots of sinus irritation, longstanding sinus colds ... when you look at the health data sheets of the substances that they're using, the lights go off," she said.

Her family was healthy, they're organic farmers, they didn't have health issues and then they popped up at the same time the industry did,

Daunheimer noted.

In an open letter to Yukoners, she cautions against the myth that strong regulations can safeguard the territory.

"Alberta states with confidence that they have 'world-class' regulations, yet I have mountains of files that show each and every well near our home was non-compliant on several levels," she writes.

Daunheimer told the *Star* she made her concerns known to the company about the air quality after the sour crude well went in.

Those concerns were never validated or recorded, which is "highly non-compliant," she said.

And when she approached the Alberta regulator? She said she was treated like a "criminal" for reporting the company.

When the Alberta Energy Regulator eventually began an investigation and did an audit on the well, the company was given a non-compliance because the family wasn't notified of the continued venting.

"They made them remove the venting tank and tie in that well so that those gases were mitigated and no longer venting," Daunheimer said.

"Each and every time a well comes in, you're inundated with diesel fumes, you're inundated with fugitive emissions, from the drilling process, the flaring process," she said.

Most of the wells near Daunheimer's home were previously owned by Angle Energy Inc., but the company has since been bought out by Belatrix Corp.

Daunheimer explained that because the company refused to engage with them about their concerns and they had difficulties dealing with the regulator as well, they decided their only option was to go to the courts.

"We feel so disappointed with the regulatory structure and culture that we feel we have no recourse but to circumvent their lack of protection and



DIANA DAUNHEIMER

litigate against the company responsible for violating our fundamental rights of personal security and enjoyment of property," she writes in her open letter.

"The only way to protect your family and land in the face of oil and gas exploration is to say NO! Insist your government find alternative methods of revenue generation and pursue renewable energy options that are not going to destroy the pristine ecosystem you currently enjoy," she says.

Daunheimer sent her letter to the select committee last week. It has not yet been posted on the committee's website.

The all-party committee was formed last May to gain a scientific understanding of the controversial practice and to make recommendations to the government about whether it should permit the practice for shale gas development in the territory.

Testimony from experts and comments from the public are available on the committee's website at <http://www.legassembly.gov.yk.ca/rbhf.html>

See letters, pages 17, 20.



Photos courtesy DIANA DAUNHEIMER

INDUSTRIAL NEIGHBOURS – A sump at one of six hydraulic fracturing sites surrounding the Daunheimers' property is tested.