

A warning from Wisconsin on frac sand mines

(3/1/2017)

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I am writing to the people of Winona County to warn them of what we are enduring here in Trempealeau County in regard to frac sand mining.

The first landowners who sold out to mine companies were under a gag order and could tell no one until the mine owners had bought enough land to have a hold. Then they popped out of their holes like gophers, taking us citizens quite by surprise.

One reason we were not alarmed initially was because of a small mine near Taylor. I spoke with the townspeople there who told me the mine had been there for 25 years and a contract for 25 more years had just been signed. The family that owns that mine is very generous to the school and community. There are no problems with light, noise or dust. A rail spur eliminates trucking.

I've been at many meetings; beware of the mine representatives who come from "wherever" dressed in suits. Every word that comes from their mouths is a lie and the first to fall for the false promises were the mayors because they wanted the money.

One promise was that the sludge ponds would be lined with clay. The Guza mine near Independence was not lined and later was shut down.

Another promise made was that all sand would be covered. I have stood on the sidewalk in downtown Independence, watching all the sand trucks roll through, about a truck per minute.

About half of the loads were covered. The huge piles of sand at mines are not covered.

Winds whip dust high into the air even in the winter when mines are not operating.

The promise of jobs is just a ploy. The few select positions offered require college degrees in specialized fields. Trained equipment operators are brought in from other job sites.

People from other counties came to our informational meetings to warn us. You may suddenly find your property landlocked when land around it is sold. If you live near a mine you can no longer enjoy outdoor activities with your children or have a backyard barbecue. Forget ever hanging your laundry on the clothesline, and you won't be opening any windows, even air-conditioners cannot compete with the dust. One woman said no insurance company will insure her horse anymore because horses get silicosis from silica dust — so do humans! The speakers at meetings gave statistics that show making America energy independent with frac sand mines is a pipe dream. In countries that sell petroleum to America, laborers are not paid a decent wage. If we paid workers here for similar jobs, you would be paying \$12 per gallon of gas at the pump.

Trempealeau County has lost much valuable farmland that can never be regained as reclamation provides only six inches of soil, and not necessarily top soil. Our county hosts 25 percent of the nation's frac sand mines. Our sand goes to Winona, where it is loaded on

barges and sent to the gulf. There it is sold on a global market, with China buying much of it for the manufacturing of glass.

Neighbors of mines have had the foundations of their buildings crack. Their water quality and quantity has decreased and in some cases, they have had to dig new wells. Families have split up, neighbors are at odds with one another. Efforts were made to have some mine opponents fired even though they are employed in other counties. Home values have already dropped in Whitehall as much as 35 to 50 percent.

The city of Whitehall has tried to annex a parcel of land not contiguous to the city, when not all landowners affected have signed agreements. Opponents call this arrangement “a balloon on a string,” and wonder who will maintain this area of the city way out in the country. We are also fighting the Whitehall sand and rail project, which would be located within a mile of our new school and brand new County Health Care Center which just opened its doors a few months ago. Mine companies have said there would be an additional 100 railroad cars going through town each day. There is only one way to get through Whitehall and that is to cross already busy railroad tracks. Children would no longer be able to walk or bicycle to school, nor would they be able to access the pool on the other side of town. Emergency vehicles would not get through.

I sincerely hope that you will learn from our mistakes. Go to meetings, get involved and try to stop this dreadful plague.