

June Chappel

Statement for Senate Health Education Labor and Pension Committee

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My name is June Chappel. I live in Hopewell Township in Washington County, Pennsylvania, located about 10 minutes northeast of Washington, PA. In 2007, the 118 acres of property surrounding my home was sold by a coal company to a gas drilling company. Seven horizontal gas wells were drilled to the right of my home within 800 feet from my house. A 15 million gallon wastewater impoundment was placed approximately 200 feet directly behind my house.

The wastewater impoundment smells like gasoline and kerosene, and the wind blows across the impoundment right into my back yard. I tell people that the wastewater impoundment is bigger than a football field. The location had been a mix of woods and field prior to the gas company's purchase of the land. The gas company had a logger come in and clear the woods around us.

When they drilled the wells, my house vibrated 24 hours a day 7 days a week, it was pretty horrific. When the drilling was done, the gas company began the fracking of the wells. This was 9 days of heart pounding noise. That is what I called it, with all the compressors that were over there, it was constant 24 hours a day for 9 days.

In the early September 2009, when the gas company was done with the fracking, the flaring started. Close to the wastewater impoundment, the gas company placed a large blue pipe

that was to be used for the flaring after the wells were fracked, located approximately 500 feet from my house.

We had to go out at 4 in the morning and rescue our beagles due to the extreme noise and heat. We found my dogs out there cowering in their dog boxes. We put up with this noise for 3 days. After I returned home from Wal-Mart, I just had to get away from this for a while; I found a "local volunteer" fire department at the site. The local fire department was "**not**" even our local fire department that should be in my area! The fire department that would normally cover a fire in my area is West Middletown Volunteer Fire Department, located about 8 minutes away. The fire department on scene was Canton Twp Volunteer Fire Department, located about 20 minutes away. At the time, I did not even think about why Canton was at the scene and not our fire department.

The fire department had a truck down at the flare, spraying the blue flare pipe. I could see the liner of the wastewater impoundment with little fires across the top of the impoundment and around the corner of it. Each smaller fire was low to the ground, right above the wastewater impoundment liner. The extent of the fire on the liner was not truly realized until days later when the gas company replaces a very large section of liner that had burnt in the fire, which can be seen in my photos.

The fire department with their one unit stayed there the remainder of the time during the flaring. But even with this presence, we felt were very fearful of our lives. The fire department was a local volunteer department and we did not even know if they had the proper training to deal with such a fire, let alone whatever the chemicals that were in the impoundment.

I was really scared. My son and I went running down there to see what was going on. I get one of these guys with a white hat and I asked him what was going on, he said that they were

trying to cool down the blue flare pipe. I thought I was going to have a heart attack right there. Neither the fire department nor the drilling company ever came to our house to warn us of the fire. "No evacuation was issued".

I did turn in this situation to the Pennsylvania DEP, but nobody believed me that there was a fire. The DEP was not aware that there was even a fire. The gas company claimed there was never any danger and there was not a fire, but my pictures speak otherwise. Not until I showed the man from the DEP my pictures, did they believe me. A fire department was involved, but not even our department. We never saw a police presence, let alone OSHA, the DEP, or another type of emergency personnel such as EMTs.

Evidently, 911 was never called by the gas company to notify the fire department of the danger. If 911 had been called, the DEP would have been notified of the fires. As I mentioned, the DEP was not aware of the fire.

I had found out later from one of the workers that they were using an 8 inch pipe on this flare, opening all 7 wells at once to flare. I was told they usually only use a 2 inch pipe to flare. This almost ended in disaster. I was told by someone in the company that they were "learning as they go". My response to them was unfortunately at my expense. It was really tremendous, this noise and the heat from this thing. When it was lit, it sounded like a 747 jet within my home. We lost days of sleep.

It is important to point out that all this was going on soon after my husband Dave was diagnosed and dying of kidney cancer. Not only did my son and I have to deal living through this, but we were attempting to support my husband through his illness. Through all of his illness, there was never any compassion from the company. We were never informed of anything going in around us. We were never informed of the dangers. The only thing they ever

offered was for us to be “**displaced**” from our home and go to a motel during the drilling, fracking, and flaring. All my husband wanted was to live his final days in peace at home, not in a motel!

By the 3rd day I was beside myself, I went down to the corporate office to try to get this shut off. My husband asked where I was going, I told him “out”, but he knew where I was going. At the corporate office, I told them I was going to charge them by the hour for every hour they put my family through this hell. The man I was talking to said he would be up to the house in an hour. I said to him just remember on your way home from my place, “I have to live there”. When I arrive home, my husband asked if I was nice, I said “I tried to be”.

Within one hour of leaving the corporate offices, the guy from the gas company arrived. Within two hours, they had the flare shut off. I was thrilled, just to have a normal country sound.

One thing I found out later was how dangerous this fire was with the chemicals in the wastewater impoundment. The entire impoundment, the surface of the water and all, could have caught on fire. The only protection I had was a “local volunteer” fire department hosing down a flare pipe.

After the fracking and still to this day I have this hissing and rattling sound in my ears, it sounds like I am in a pit of rattle snakes. I told them the day I went to the corporate office that it was noise was rattling my windows and doors. Even though we did not have air conditioning, we had to keep our windows and doors shut. It was terrible.

Despite the fire and the melting of the impoundment liner, the gas company “patched” the burnt sections. The wastewater impoundment and all its noxious smells remained in my back yard until late spring. A representative from the gas company came to my house and said that they were finally going to get rid of the impoundment. I asked why, he said “it was the right

thing to do.” He did not mention that I had hired an attorney and that there was too much bad publicity, because I had already made the media a couple of times and have had numerous people up to my property to see the hell my family was living through. This situation was only made worse by the fact that the gas company never contacted us, warning us about the flaring and the dangers that were involved. Once the situation became out of control, neither the gas company nor the fire department thought it necessary to evacuate both my family and all the other families around us. We even wondered if the fire department had any clue as to how truly dangerous the situation had become when dealing with the flare pipe, let alone the chemicals in a wastewater impoundment.

The good news about the wastewater impoundment being filled in was bitter sweet. On February 26th, 2010, my husband Dave died. I know he would have been proud of me.