

## Investigation: A Burning Water Warning

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The water rancher Jay Marcom pulls out of the ground is firewater, but you probably wouldn't want to drink it.

Put a match to this stuff and it burns.

As the Barnett Shale boom brings North Texas thousands of new gas wells and hundreds of miles of pipeline, a rancher west of Dallas-Fort Worth says, "Watch out."



"This is your future in the Metroplex," Marcom warns.

His land was part of an earlier boom. For decades, a number of natural gas companies have crisscrossed his family's Stephens county ranch.

Marcom says they left an environmental mess.

"The only thing that holds these lines together in this area are these clamps," Marcom said as he walked toward a rusty pipe exposed in the crumbling bank of a creek bed. The clamp holds together two sections of pipe and is known as a Dresser coupling. It's bent and rusty.

In early 2007, Marcom discovered that the old gas line was leaking and killing vegetation.

"This pipe was laid in 1919," Marcom said.

His complaint led a state regulator to write the pipeline's owner that "it was "apparent" the line was "not being maintained to prevent leaks."

Enbridge owns the pipe. After receiving Marcom's complaint, the company stopped using the gas line on his property, but still uses it off his ranch. Enbridge spokesman, Bill Stephens, says the company owns 3,300 miles of pipeline in North Texas. 189 of those miles use Dresser couplings.

Enbridge hired a helicopter to fly over its pipelines in Stephens County that also have the Dresser coupling. They used infrared technology to look for leaks, but did not find any others.

As if one cleanup wasn't bad enough, in addition to Enbridge's pipe problem, Marcom has six other cleanups on his ranch involving several different companies.

"This is a monitoring well that we had put in to monitor the ground water below this old compressor site," Marcom said as he unlocked the cap to the well.

He drilled the well so that he could test the ground water where another company, Pryor Petroleum, used to run a compressor to pump gas through the pipelines.

He used a string to lower a plastic cylinder down the well and quickly pulled it back out. Murky brown water filled the tube. It was topped with an inch-and-a-half ring that looked like motor oil and smelled like gasoline.

Marcom dumped the water on the ground, put a lighter to it, and backed up fast. It sparked and popped and burned until consuming the last drop of liquid.

"The water that's coming out of there is not toxic. It's not hazardous." Marcom said of the well. "It's deadly."

The rancher filed a complaint, demanding that Pryor Petroleum clean up the soil and groundwater. So far, the company has proposed drilling a series of its own monitoring wells to test for pollution and to determine how far it has spread.

The railroad commission is reviewing Pryor's plan.

FOX 4 tested the water from Marcom's well and found it contained 680 times more benzene, which causes cancer, than the railroad commission allows.

At still another location on the ranch, BAM Operating separates natural gas from the liquids that also come up a gas well.

This site was supposed to have already been cleaned up.

But when we visited, we found liquid dripping out of an open pipe right onto the ground.

Marcom filled a cup and asked, "think it will light?"

When poured on the ground, this stuff nearly exploded.

It lit like gasoline.

"Yeah, it burns," Marcom announced.

FOX 4 collected a sample and found it had benzene levels 121,000 times higher than the state allows in ground water.

"It seemed like almost a refined gasoline product, almost what you would buy at the pump," said Brad Moravec of TTI Environmental Laboratories.

Marcom told the railroad commission about the leak. The commission quickly issued BAM a violation notice and refused to sign off on the cleanup.

BAM's owner Clay Morris says he thinks his company has the site cleaned up, but is waiting for the commission's okay.

Morris blames his problems on the land owner. He accuses Marcom himself of polluting the land and filing false reports.

Marcom denies that, but considering the amount of documented problems on his ranch, if he is faking the pollution, he's doing a slick job.

In fact, on our visit, Marcom pointed to a creek covered with a slick of oily stuff reminiscent of the ocean after a tanker accident.

"That's oil just floating on top of the water," Marcom said.

The state's environmental agency, T.C.E.Q., does not get involved with pollution involving the oil and gas industry. It can't. By state law, the railroad commission has oversight.

Currently, there are about 500 cleanup sites in the state being monitored by the commission. Seven of those are on Marcom's ranch.