

# TCEQ: No Widespread Air Quality Issues In Barnett Shale

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) has completed a survey of approximately 220 natural gas production sites in the Barnett Shale and found only two that exceeded safe levels. Those two facilities were corrected and are in compliance now.

The first survey included 126 sites in December 2009. The TCEQ said the tests did not find detectable levels of volatile organic compounds (VOC) or levels that cause short-term or long-term health concerns.

**John Sadler**, deputy director of the Office of Compliance and Enforcement at TCEQ, said: "In fact, the majority of the testing during that trip found no detection of volatile organic compounds at all."

TCEQ and the Texas Railroad Commission (RRC) were criticized by some citizens in North Texas who believed that benzene and other harmful chemicals were being emitted by natural gas drilling and production activities.

The second set of tests included the monitoring of 94 sites in North Texas and found no problems at the vast majority of the locations, but 19 locations registered elevated levels of benzene but not exceeding the maximum level for the tests of 180 ppb.

Overall, TCEQ Chief Toxicologist Dr. **Michael Honeycutt** said based on the test results, the commission believes there is "no need for widespread alarm" among North Texas residents since the vast majority of the monitors showed volatile organic compounds (VOCs) to be within acceptable levels while the problems were relegated to only a few select locations.

"Nothing here was really anything that surprised us," Sadler said. "As a matter of fact, had we not seen the things that we did, I'd have been very surprised. We know that the gas characteristics as we move across this field change; actually the characteristics of the gas change with wells a thousand yards from each other. So we expected to see benzene and we did, but the benzene again is very localized, so we don't have widespread air quality issues, at least according to the data which we generated in this study. And it's a pretty wide area that we looked at."

The Targa North Texas LP Bryan Compressor Station had a benzene reading of 1,100 ppb, while a Devon Energy well had a concentration of 15,000 ppb five feet from the well as a result of an open valve. Both problems were corrected and subsequent TCEQ tests showed the Targa site with a reading of 0.21 ppb and the Devon well at 0.18 ppb, well within acceptable levels. The Short Term ESL maximum for benzene is 180 ppb.

The other 19 sites Short Term tests exceeded the Long Term ESL for benzene of 1.4 ppb but were below the Short Term ESL of 180 ppb. TCEQ is working with the owners of these sites to ensure that repairs are made to bring potentially future high benzene levels back into ambient levels.

The TCEQ will continue testing and working with the industry to deal with emissions issues and ensure that the air is safe for North Texas residents.

The results of the TCEQ study can be found on TCEQ's Barnett Shale website: <http://www.tceq.state.tx.us/implementation/barnettshale>.

## RRC Chairman Carrillo Issues Air Emissions Statement

"This is a vitally important issue to Texas. Not only from a public health standpoint but also from an economic standpoint with tens of thousands of jobs at stake. Therefore solutions need to be based on scientific facts gathered and analyzed by independent bodies, not conjecture and accusations. TCEQ's efforts will not stop with this study and they will continue their monitoring and collection effort. The Railroad Commission will continue to play an active role in the ongoing discussions with both state and local officials. An outright drilling moratorium as suggested by Democratic Representative Lon Burnam, based on the facts we have in hand to date, would be a drastic overreaction to this issue and would negatively impact Texas."

For Chairman Carrillo's complete statement, go to the Texas Alliance's website: [www.texasalliance.org](http://www.texasalliance.org). The statement is on the Home Page under "News Updates."