

How Far Should Oil Wells Be From Homes?

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How far should an oil well be away from a home? That's the discussion in front of the North Dakota House Energy and Natural Resources Committee today.

House Bill 1348 would change the setbacks for oil and gas wells.

It increases the distance a well head is from a home from 500 feet to a quarter of a mile. Bill sponsors say the proposal would help protect residents living near well sites.

Two residents told lawmakers about the negative experiences they have living next to wells.

<< (Brenda Jorgenson / Mountrail County) "The vibration from drilling is felt in your body, it's right in your soul. It feels like you are at a concert when the bass is way too loud. Sometimes my ears just want to be held tight. It's very unnerving."

(Clarke Stevens / Glenburn) "Sometimes in the summer my kids can't even stand to be outside playing. The smell bothers my daughter Valerie to the point of nausea and has made her vomit on occasion. Although there may be nothing that can be done in my situation. I can only hope that going forward that you as elected officials will take the proper measures that another family like mine won't have to deal with the same problems.">>

Oil officials say they sympathize with those experiencing problems but argue the unintended consequences for regulating further setbacks are significant.

The industry has created a more efficient way of oil development, spacing well pads two miles apart. Oil leaders say the proposal would jeopardize that plan and create more problems.

Ron Ness with the North Dakota Petroleum Council, says if passed, North Dakota would be the most strident state for setbacks.

<<(Ron Ness / ND Petroleum Council) This is a significant change. You are more than doubling the setback distance. It will have a significant impact on mineral owners, it will have a significant impact on way the Bakken is developed, and a significant impact on the farming and ranching operations.">>

Five thousand wells have been drilled in the Bakken.

There is a similar bill in the senate that also proposes increasing well set back regulations.