

Craig and Julie Sautner Susquehanna County, PA

Craig and Julie Sautner moved to Dimock, PA in March of 2008. Their dream was to see their two children through high school and then college, and eventually to retire in the small rural town they loved. But that was before Cabot Oil and Gas turned Dimock into what some residents now call the “ground zero” of the Marcellus Shale natural gas boom.

It began with a wave of heavy truck traffic on the once quiet roads. Soon Cabot representatives were calling on residents, offering to pay for the mineral rights to their land. Refusal would be useless, they said, since others had already signed. The gas would be extracted from beneath their homes with or without their consent, so best to take the money that was offered. Unaware of the dangers inherent in the extreme hydro-fracturing techniques the company planned to use, residents were assured that nothing could go wrong.

Yet on September 11, 2008, just one month after the drilling began on a well near the Sautners' home, things began to go wrong. The Sautners' water turned yellow and cloudy. Tests by the Department of Environmental Protection and an independent lab traced the contamination to the Cabot well. The company denied any responsibility, but gave the family a 550-gallon water tank and later set up what the Sautners refer to as “the science lab in the basement:” a filtration system that grew more complex as new filters were added to cope with emerging pollutants. The Sautners' are currently relying on the tank for water for washing and bathing, and pay out of pocket for drinking water and for the cost of heating the tank to make it usable in the winter.

The Sautners, along with more than a dozen other local families, are involved in a lawsuit against Cabot.

John Hanger, former Secretary of the Department of Environmental Protection, spoke forcefully on behalf of the Sautners and other impacted residents of Dimock late last summer and fall. On August 31st he told the *Times-Tribune*, “We will be complete advocates, regardless, for this permanent water solution,” after meeting with the affected families. He repeatedly affirmed that the methane contamination had been proved by DEP testing to be caused by Cabot's drilling. When Cabot continued to deny responsibility for the methane migration, Hanger issued a press release on September 29th, 2010 and told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that the DEP had amassed “overwhelming” evidence that Cabot's wells were poorly constructed. ***“It's as though Cabot lives on a planet or a universe in which it gets to choose its facts and its opinions,”*** Hanger said.

When Mr. Hanger visited Craig and Julie Sautner's home in September 2010, he observed the brown silt and water in the 550-gallon water buffalo in the Sautner's garage (which Cabot had

filled with water for the family). Craig Sautner shook a milk jug full of water from the disconnected water well, and the jug filled with an inch of white suds. Mr. Sautner said, "We shouldn't have to live like this. Enough's enough."

However, despite Hanger's promises, the affected families never got a permanent source of clean water. Instead, a group calling itself "Enough Already" championed the cause of killing the water pipeline project, even though it would not have been funded at taxpayer expense, but at Cabot's expense. The group held a large public forum at a Dimock high school late last fall, carefully controlling the forum to allow only pro-industry and anti-water solution points of view and disallowing independent scientific information regarding the methane contamination.

In an extraordinary feat of "astro-turf" public relations maneuvering, the group literally turned Mr. Sautner's words, "enough is enough," upside down and presented the town of Dimock as a victim of the people whose water had been contaminated, rather than building support for those who had already been living with poisoned water for over two years.

The Sautners continued to feel the gas drilling industry's ire even after the water pipeline was defeated. Cabot forced the Sautners to endure harassing, lengthy home inspections looking for lead paint or anything else which could have contributed to water contamination, and drilled into their yard multiple times to look for pre-existing contaminants. In May 2011, Mr. Sautner told a crowd of about 200 at Corning West High School in New York, "I've been abused by the gas industry like you wouldn't believe" during his three-year ordeal.

Sautner closed his remarks in New York's Southern Tier with a warning: "On the ride up here, I saw what beautiful country you have here. Don't let [the gas industry] ruin it on you."