

PARKER COUNTY AND THE EPA

THE FACTS

On December 7, 2010, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 6 administrator Al Armendariz issued an unprecedented “endangerment order” against Range Resources, alleging that its gas drilling operations in Parker County, Tex., had caused methane to enter groundwater. The case was brought to EPA after video surfaced of a landowner igniting water coming out of a garden hose. Subsequent scientific testing presented to state regulators, however, showed that the “fingerprint” of the methane was a naturally-occurring variety, and the state’s investigation determined [gas drilling was not to blame](#). Emails later made public also revealed a “strategy” to get EPA involved, including utilizing a friendly audience in Armendariz. In the spring 2012, EPA withdrew the order.

FACT: Minutes before EPA’s announcement of its endangerment order, EPA’s Al Armendariz [emailed](#) several local anti-fracking activists: “We’re about to make a lot of news,” adding that they should “Tivo channel 8.” He also thanked the activists “for helping to educate me on the public’s perspective of these issues.”

FACT: EPA pursued the order over the objections of the Texas Railroad Commission (RRC), which repeatedly warned the agency that its efforts were “premature” due to RRC’s ongoing investigation and a lack of credible data.

- RRC chairman Victor Carrillo: “As I repeatedly emphasized to EPA Region 6 Administrator Al Armendariz last Friday, EPA’s actions are premature as the Railroad Commission continues to actively investigate this issue and has not yet determined the cause of the gas. This EPA action is unprecedented in Texas, and commissioners will consider all options as we move forward.”
- RRC commissioner Elizabeth Ames Jones: “If this is another EPA action designed to reach pre-determined conclusions and to generate headlines rather than conduct a successful environmental investigation, then the public is poorly served.”

FACT: Experts conclusively showed, through nitrogen fingerprinting (a test the EPA refused to conduct, and about which EPA [tried to prevent Range](#) from inquiring), that the methane found in the water wells was originating from the Strawn Formation, not from the Barnett Shale from which Range was producing. This contradicted EPA’s [assertion](#) that the methane “closely match[es] that from Range Resources’ natural gas production well.”

FACT: A district judge [later ruled](#) in early 2012 that a consultant named Alisa Rich had convinced the property owner to hook a garden hose up to a gas vent – *not the water line* – “to provide local and national news media a deceptive video, calculated to alarm the public into believing the water was burning.” The judge also noted: “This demonstration was not done for scientific study.” Rich had [advised](#) the property owner to do this because “it is worth every penny if we can get jurisdiction to EPA.”

FACT: In the face of overwhelming evidence refuting EPA’s basis for involving itself in Parker County, the agency [dropped the order](#) against Range Resources in March 2012. Nonetheless, Range Resources agreed to conduct additional tests of water wells near its gas drilling operations in Parker County, which have since been sold.

FACT: Interestingly, a few months prior to the Dec. 2010 endangerment order, EPA’s Armendariz [told a north Texas audience](#) that his philosophy of regulating the oil and gas industry was “kind of like how the Romans used to conquer little villages in the Mediterranean.” He continued: “they’d find the first five guys they saw and **they would crucify them**. And then you know that town was really easy to manage for the next few years.”

FACT: Armendariz resigned in 2012, and is now employed at the [Sierra Club](#) – which runs an anti-fracking program called “Beyond Natural Gas.”