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Couple say drilling caused well water problems

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— A lawsuit filed on behalf of two Johnson County landowners seeks damages, alleging that Chesapeake Energy Corporation's drilling activities contaminated their well water supply.

Dallas-based Turley Law Firm filed the suit in the 413th District Court in Cleburne on June 1 against the natural gas producer on behalf of Jim and Linda Scoma.

The plaintiffs allege that the defendants contaminated their water well during fracking, the method used to extract minerals by shooting chemical fluids underground to fracture rock formation, which stimulates gas well production.

The suit also states that the Oklahoma-based company stored its drilling waste at sites and disposal wells and has disposed of its fracturing waste in injection wells near the Scomas' property in northern Johnson County near Crowley.

The water well is the only source of drinking and washing water on the property.

The plaintiffs said in the suit that the well water intermittently turned an orange-yellow color, tasted bad and gave off a foul odor.

The suit states that testing performed in 2008 and again in 2009 on the well water showed an increased concentration of harmful petroleum byproducts, such as benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, xylene, barium and iron.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, benzene is a known carcinogen and cautions against long-term exposure, which can effect bone marrow and cause anemia and leukemia.

The plaintiffs began buying water from an alternative source for drinking and washing after an incident in which Linda Scoma's hair turned an orange color after washing it.

Julie Wilson, Chesapeake vice president for corporate development, said that the company does not comment on pending litigation.

No hearing date has been set.