

BROOMFIELD ENTERPRISE

GUEST OPINION

Fracking is hurting our children

By Megan Barickman

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Now that the weather is starting to cool off, I can breathe a short-lived sigh of relief. As the mother of a young child with asthma, I spent most of the summer feverishly tracking local air quality on AirNow.gov. It was a horrible summer for the air: ozone levels were at dangerous highs almost every day.

But you can't force a two-year-old to "limit heavy exertion" as the Air Quality Index recommends, so I usually watched helplessly as my little girl would sprint ahead and then stop, rasping and coughing.

With the cooler weather the air quality should improve somewhat, since ozone levels are highest on hot, sunny days. Next summer, however, the sickly air will be back, and it could be much worse if fracking operations continue to encroach on our homes. Oil and gas operations are one of the leading contributors to ozone pollution on the Front Range according to the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) in Boulder. As a result, a significant number of Colorado children, including my daughter, will suffer asthma attacks from oil and gas-related activities.

The air pollution from local fracking operations impacts the entire Front Range, but the effects are worse, of course, closest to the well. We are fortunate that we don't live too close to any oil and gas wells at the moment, but that could easily change — with devastating effects for my little girl's health.

And there are other reasons besides ozone to be concerned. The Colorado School of Public Health reports that people living near fracking wells suffer from sore throats and nosebleeds in addition to asthma and difficulty breathing. A recent blood test revealed that a six-year-old child in Erie, who lives within a mile of 158 oil and gas wells, had been exposed to dangerous levels of benzene and ethylbenzene, both potent carcinogens and both by-products of fracking activities.

Like any mother, I want my daughter to be safe and healthy. If our government continues to allow fracking operations near our homes and schools, I am certain that she won't be either.

Under current law, fracking operations can take place as close as 500 feet from homes and schools. The science is clear: 500 feet is entirely too close to our children.

But we have a chance to take the future of Colorado's children into our own hands.

Proposition 112, a ballot initiative for safer setbacks of 2,500 feet, will appear on the ballot in November. Please vote "yes" on Proposition 112 for common-sense setbacks for oil and gas activities.

Together, we can keep Colorado's children safe.

Megan Barickman is a resident of Broomfield