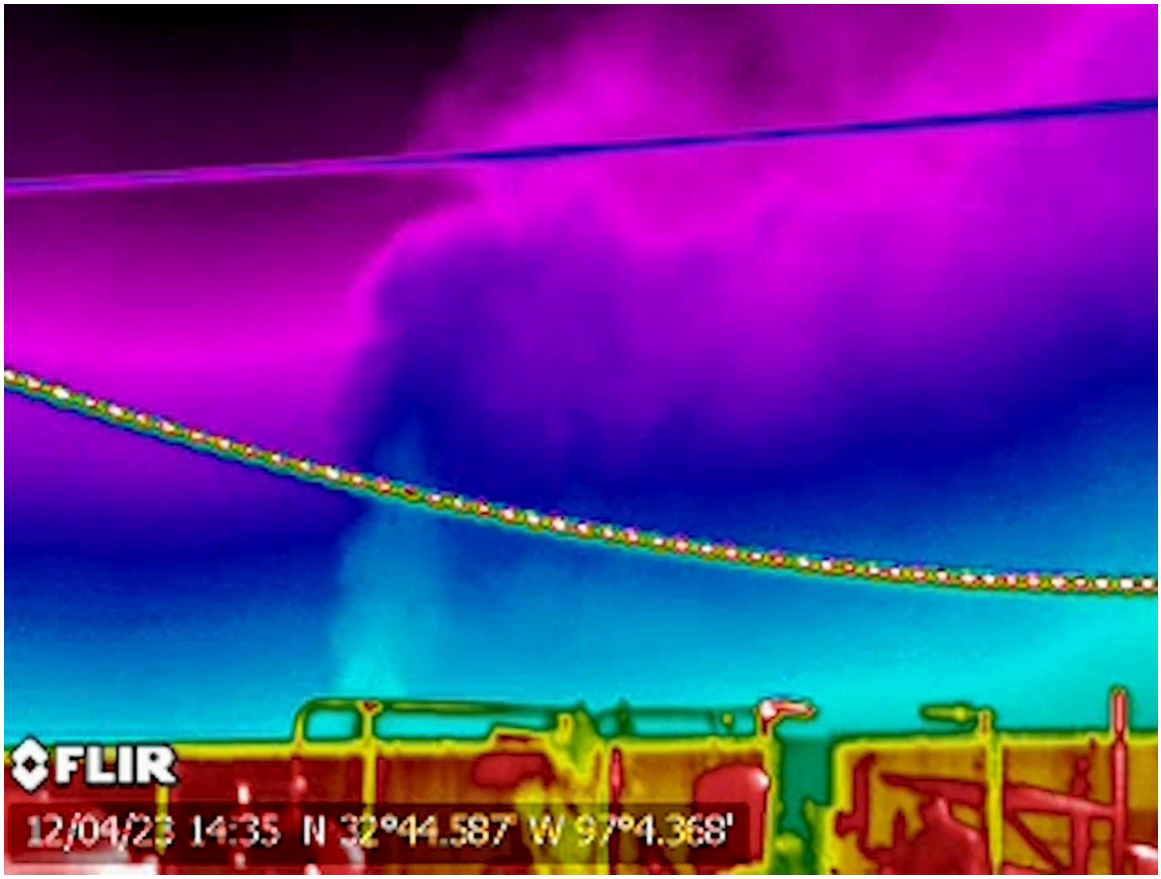
Reuters

Arlington's kids are paying for Europe’s Gas: Alarm over Fracking Health Risks in America’s World Cup City

By Terry Slavin
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Infrared monitoring of TEEP Barnett’s GM well pad in Arlington, Texas, on 12/04/2023. The closest homes are 213 metres away from the site.
Earthworks Total Disregard report/Handout via REUTERS

Summary

- **World Cup venue near Dallas, Texas sits on top of Barnett Shale, where a subsidiary of TotalEnergies, TEEP Barnett, owns 2,800 wells.**
- **City of Arlington permits fracking as close as 300 feet (100m) from homes, schools and daycare centres.**
- **Scientists point to health risk of exposure to chemicals released with methane emissions, particularly on children.**
- **Infrared monitoring of TEEP Barnett sites found 85 methane pollution events over six months.**
- **TotalEnergies disputes monitoring results, denies adverse impacts of its operations, and underlines leadership on methane emissions reduction**

June 16 - The AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, is the home of the Dallas Cowboys – American football royalty and five-time winners of the Super Bowl. This month, the 94,000-seat venue, described by FIFA as “a jaw-dropping example of stadium architecture”, is again holding fevered global attention as host to nine World Cup matches, including a semi-final.

Ranjana Bhandari, who leads community group Liveable Arlington, said in a Zoom call that she wanted millions of watching Europeans to know that just 2,500 feet (750 metres) away from the stadium, on the other side of a four-lane highway, the U.S. subsidiary of French energy giant TotalEnergies is fracking for gas.

The Barnett Shale lies directly under this city of 400,000 people, between Dallas and Fort Worth, and TotalEnergies E&P Barnett USA (TEEP Barnett) is one of the biggest operators, owning 2,800 wells and 750 well pad sites in East Arlington, where the stadium is located.

And it is expanding its operations. On June 9, just days before the stadium’s opening match, TEEP Barnett received permits to add nine new gas wells at two sites, as close as a third of a mile away from several primary and secondary schools, says Bhandari.

Bhandari says almost 1 million people in Arlington and the wider Tarrant County live less than half a mile from a fracking site, with gas extraction happening as close as 300 feet (100 metres) from homes, schools and daycare centres.

This means Arlington’s children are in close range of the industry's health risks - in contrast to children in European countries, including France, which have banned fracking, she says.

Scientific research institute PSE Healthy Energy, which has been studying the health hazards from nature gas infrastructure for 10 years, says methane, which comprises 50-99% of natural gas, is a potent greenhouse gas but non-toxic.



Dallas Stadium, Arlington, Texas, during the venue's first World Cup match on 14 June, 2026. The 94,000-seat stadium is the largest of the World Cup venues and will host nine matches, including a semi-final. REUTERS/Kai Pfaffenbach

The health risk to communities is instead from the hazardous chemicals that are released alongside methane in 99% of the cases PSE has studied. These chemicals, known as volatile organic compounds (VOC), in 97% of cases include benzene, a carcinogen linked to blood cancers and birth defects. When combusted, they also emit particulate matter and nitrogen oxide, a leading cause of asthma attacks, PSE says.

“Europeans banned fracking because they could buy (gas) from here pretty cheaply,” Bhandari said. “Maybe (the World Cup) is an opportunity for them to understand the true cost of their demand for cheap gas.”

The World Cup comes just two months after TotalEnergies, the leading exporter of liquified natural gas (LNG) from the U.S., agreed a deal with the Trump administration to abandon $928 million in offshore wind leases and reinvest the money in U.S. oil, gas and LNG projects.

The fact that Total’s LNG activity is centred on the Eagle Ford and Anadarko Basins in Texas, which are in sparsely populated rural areas, while gas fracked in the Barnett Shale supplies local utilities, doesn’t absolve Europeans, Bhandari insists. “I know that ***if Europe did not buy***

as much LNG as it does from Texas, Total would not grow fracking in densely populated places like Arlington."

In a written statement, a TotalEnergies spokesman said "TEEP Barnett is not aware of any scientific data that finds severe impacts on human rights and the environment from its operations."

The company added that TotalEnergies had taken a leadership role in reducing methane emissions, setting a goal for near-zero methane emissions by 2030, something it had achieved five years early, achieving methane intensity of 0.07% in 2025 globally.

The 0.07% methane intensity level was also met by TEEP Barnett's operations, through measures such as "converting our natural-gas driven devices to electric or air-powered systems and conducting FLIR (forward-looking infrared) camera surveys and AUSEA drone surveys at all our pads".



A children's playground in Arlington, Texas, was originally located 330 feet from where Total Energies' subsidiary TEEP Barnett, is producing gas. The playground has since been moved 600 feet away from the site. Liveable Arlington/Handout via REUTERS

However, in March this year the NGO Carbon Mapper said its Tanager-1 satellite had detected large releases of methane, known as super-emitter events, from two TEEP Barnett facilities.

The plumes, emitting at rates of 1,900 kilogrammes per hour and 831 kg/hr, were observed over four to five days, Carbon Mapper said. A super-emitter event is one that emits more than 100 kg/hr.

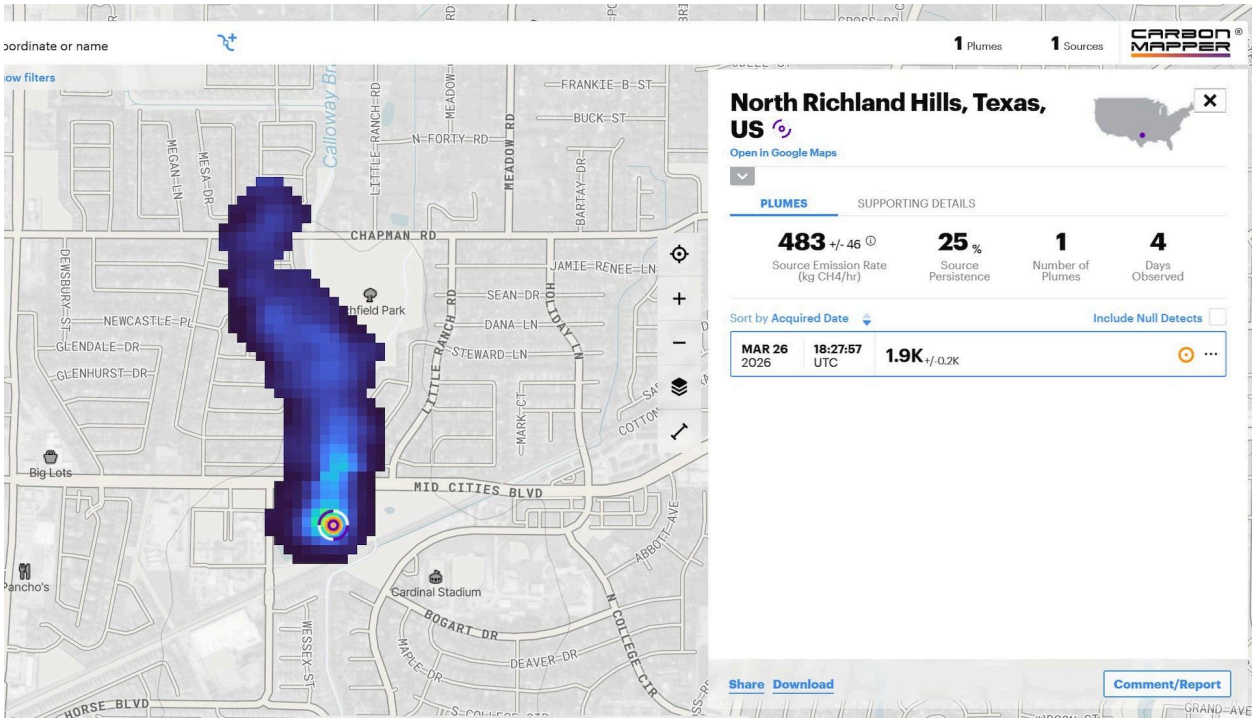
Asked about the two events, the Total Energies spokesperson said that a “limited, controlled, short-term emissions release” occurred at the facilities as part of “planned maintenance activities”.

They “were five times lower than the levels cited by Carbon Mapper,” and had been “authorised by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) Permits-by-Rule and related regulations. These regulations are protective of human health and the environment,” the spokesperson said.

The contention that Arlington’s residents are being protected, particularly its children, doesn’t wash with Bhandari, whose organisation had lobbied the City of Arlington to turn down TEEP Barnett’s latest permit.

While a causal link between close exposure to fracking operations and health harm is lacking, Bhandari points to a 2022 study by the Yale School of Public Health, which found that children in Pennsylvania who lived within about 1.2 miles (2km) of hydraulic fracturing sites at birth were two to three times more likely to be later diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia, the most common childhood cancer.

A 2012 study, meanwhile, showed elevated asthma risk to children in Tarrant County, compared to the rest of the state, and the U.S.



Carbon Mapper's Tanager-1 satellite detected a plume of methane emitting at a rate of 1.9 thousand kilograms per hour from a TEEP Barnett facility in Arlington,Texas, in March 2026. Carbon Mapper/Handout via REUTERS

Asked about the impact of methane emissions events on children, Kelsey Bilsback, PSE's principal scientist, said: "We definitely know children are more vulnerable to exposure from air pollution in general because they breathe at a higher rate per body mass than adults. Their systems are still developing, so they're more vulnerable from that sense as well."

In the U.S., a handful of states have either banned or placed a moratorium on fracking. In California, new oil and gas wells must be no closer than 3,200 feet of homes and schools. But in Texas, cities like Arlington are prevented by law from turning down fracking permit applications, as long as they are "commercially reasonable". They can, however, establish rules for how far they must be from other properties.

In Arlington's case, the setback is 600 feet, although this can be reduced to 300 feet if a super-majority on the council approves it.

In January 2025, Bhandari watched helplessly as the city council, which had turned down two previous applications by TEEP Barnett to expand drilling operations near a daycare centre called Mother's Heart, voted through its latest application unanimously.

She said Liveable Arlington had previously initiated lawsuits against the city, challenging the validity of its permits, in an attempt to prevent more drilling near Mother's Heart.

At the January council meeting, a TEEP Barnett spokesperson said the well pad would be surrounded by a masonry wall and a tall sound barrier, but Bhandari says there was already another well pad, with four wells, about 600 feet away from the school. The new one, called Maverick, has added 10 wells, 1,000 feet away from Mother's Heart.



Ranjana Bhandari, founder of Texas community group Liveable Arlington, says allowing Total Energies subsidiary TEEP Barnett to frack for gas within 300 feet of schools 'raises egregious concerns for children's health'. Handout via REUTERS

"It raises egregious concerns for children's health as the preschool is now downwind from not just one, but two drill sites, not four but 14 wells," Bhandari says.

The City of Arlington was sent a preview of this article but did not respond to an invitation to comment.

Bhandari says that the drilling phase exposes nearby residents to noise, light and air pollution from fleets of heavy vehicles and drilling activity. Her biggest concern, however, is the fracking phase, which is due to begin imminently, when millions of gallons of water, mixed with sand and toxic chemicals, will be sent through the pipes at high pressure, to create small fissures and release trapped natural gas.

When the pressure is released a few days later, the gas flows to the surface, along with VOCs. It is not only Mother's Heart that is in close range, she says, but three elementary schools and several apartment blocks.

Her concerns are shared by Tim Doty, an independent consultant who served as the TCEQ's mobile air monitoring manager for 28 years.

Over a six-month period to January 2024, Doty was commissioned by the NGO Earthworks to conduct infrared monitoring at 24 TEEP Barnett sites. He found more than 85 methane pollution events during 294 site visits. In 11 cases, they were at operations located less than 600 feet from childcare centres.

Doty says that even after the fracking stage has passed, there are ongoing worries about exposure to VOCs through routine emissions releases from storage tanks on site.



Texas community group Liveable Arlington wants Arlington city council to extend setback rules for new gas wells to 1,500 feet from all daycare centers and schools. Liveable Arlington/Handout via REUTERS

“It doesn’t matter whether these walls (built around the drilling sites) are 40-feet tall or not. That may keep some of the dust down a little bit, but the emissions go over the top of these walls and literally encompass whatever property is surrounding it.”

During one visit, he said “the dust from the sand was so bad it had embedded itself in low-lying clouds, so the clouds turned from white to brown”.

The Earthworks report calls for TEEP Barnett to end all fracking operations within 1,000 feet of schools or childcare centres, and for the city council to extend setback rules to 2,000 feet for schools and childcare centres, and 1,500 feet for homes.

Maxwell Homans is shareholder advocacy associate at Missouri-based Mercy Investment Services, which invests on behalf of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, a religious order concerned about environmental and social issues.
Ahead of Total Energies' annual general meeting in May last year, he and four other equity investors in the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, sought answers about Doty’s findings.

In its response, the company said TCEQ had evaluated the monitoring data from the area and “no adverse impacts to the area were identified”.



A drilling rig operated by Total Energies subsidiary TEEP Barnett near homes in Arlington, Texas. Liveable Arlington/Handout via REUTERS

It added that many of the videos “show heat signatures coming from equipment, not methane-related emissions. Additionally, some of the properties and associated equipment shown in the Earthworks videos are owned and operated by others, not TEEP Barnett.”

Doty, however, told The Ethical Corporation that he stood by the optical gas imaging (OGI) documentation. “Total is a big polluter in my opinion... Make no mistake about it.”

As a former regulator and long-time OGI programme manager he had conducted hundreds of oil and gas air assessments, and operators can distinguish between heat and gas plumes based on temperature scales and plume behaviour.

Crucially, he said, the emissions he observed were not unintended leaks but releases of methane and other VOCs inherent to its operations, such as the routine and non-routine venting by pressure relief valves on storage tanks, and during drilling, fracking and flowback, when fluids are returned.

“There’s a difference between leaks and permitted emissions. All these sites have operating permits and so they're allowed by U.S. standards to emit a certain amount of pollution.”
In particular, storage tanks are designed to emit vapours to relieve a build-up of pressure that could cause them to implode, unless they have fully functioning vapour recovery systems, he says.

“That's different than what Total is referencing in its narrative, which is about leak detection and repair in infrastructure that is not designed to leak,” says Doty.



An LNG tanker is docked at the Freeport LNG facility in Quintana, Texas, U.S. TotalEnergies is the leading exporter of liquified natural gas from the U.S. REUTERS/Joel Angel Juarez

He estimates that only about 15% of the facilities he has seen in Texas have pressure-tight vapour recovery systems in place, with no faulty gasket or loose tank hatches.
Kelsey of PSE said emissions from storage tanks are particularly worrying, because of the higher concentrations of benzene they have seen in samples, for which she said there is no safe level of exposure.

“We're really concerned if there are storage tanks emitting flash gas, which we know tends to have higher levels of heavier hydrocarbons.”

Homans of Mercy Investment Services believes that Total’s fracking activities in Arlington may breach its own Corporate Sustainability Reporting (CSR) commitments and France’s 2017 due diligence law, which requires it to take effective measures to identify risks and prevent severe impacts on human rights and the environment from its own activities and those of its subsidiaries and suppliers.

“Under the duty of vigilance law, there's a higher due diligence standard that they have to follow (than to meet Texas law),” Homans said. “And we’re not convinced that they're doing the due diligence there to make sure there are minimal impacts on communities.”

The company denies this assertion, telling Ethical Corporation: “TEEP Barnett conducts thorough due diligence prior to starting new drilling operations”, engaging directly with all stakeholders throughout the permit process, and holding public meetings. “TEEP Barnett is responsive to stakeholder concerns and adjust its operations where possible based on feedback received from stakeholders.”

For her part, Bhandari says Europeans enjoying the World Cup should understand that the climate-warming impact of methane emissions means its not just Arlington’s children who are at risk from fracking operations across the road from the AT&T stadium, and throughout her city. “If we all look at this as parents about what all of this is going to do to future generations, the answer is pretty clear. All our kids will pay for this.”

Jill Baker contributed research for this article.

Industry Insight from Ethical Corporation Magazine, a part of Thomson Reuters.

https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/society-equity/arlingtons-kids-are-paying-europes-gas-alarm-over-fracking-health-risks-americas--ecmii-2026-06-17/

https://tinyurl.com/Reuters-LA-Total