

## **Need for Colorado Well Inspectors**

*Testimony by Jennifer Whiting to Senate Water Committee October 24, 2019  
2392 Tate Ave, Fort Lupton, CO 80621; [jenpwhiting@gmail.com](mailto:jenpwhiting@gmail.com); 303-246-6543*

I am privileged to speak to you today because your committee holds one of the most powerful roles in the future of this state.

I'm not saying that to flatter you, but to impress upon you the serious nature of your duty for Colorado citizens because I learned about the importance of water the hard way.

I'm here to draw your attention to the need for well inspectors by explaining how I came to learn about this need.

My name is Jennifer Whiting, I am a full-time mom, and my husband is the fleet mechanic for the town of Firestone.

For 14 years, we have lived on our 10-acre property in Fort Lupton in the Southwest corner of Weld county. We have a few horses and chickens and enjoy raising our family in the country. For 6 months last year we had no running water on our property – consider that. No Water for drinking. Water for toilets. Water for showers. Water for laundry. Water for animals. Water is required for life.

It started shortly after Mother's Day last year when I turned on the faucets and nothing happened. It turns out the pump to our household well had died. In pulling it up to replace it, the cables snapped. So we had to drill a new well – which is how we learned of the new rules and resulting prices.

Three years ago, the Water Board of Examiners passed Rules 10.4.5.1 and 10.4.8 applying only to the Laramie Fox Hills aquifer. The purpose, as explained to me by the Division of Water Resources Hydrogeology Section Chief, for these Laramie Fox Hills-specific rules was 3-fold:

- 1) to use quality materials and well construction practices to have well longevity of 40-60 years
- 2) to protect the aquifer from contamination from irretrievable pumps left in abandoned wells
- 3) to protect the homeowners from coal sediment or sulfur in the water

As a homeowner and mom on a Laramie Fox Hills aquifer well for 14 years, I applaud that purpose.

I wholeheartedly agree that our wells should last at least a generation. And I understand this all too well because – as of this time last year - we now have had three wells on our property in 44 years. That averages a well every 14 years. That's not right.

While the new regulations would have helped us retrieve our pump, we wouldn't have needed to drill a new well or abandon equipment in the well if the driller had not taken shortcuts because he knew he could get away with it.

We now know this driller did poor work and used poor materials. He didn't grout properly. He spliced the cables 6' below the surface. He didn't follow the rules.

Without those shortcuts, we would not have had to drill another well.

But because he and drillers like him were never monitored, in our area -- where access to the aquifer is over 1000 feet deep -- you see well after well failing with corroded pipes and irretrievable pumps.

The Water Board of Examiners looked at geology as the cause of the failures and thus created these new rules. But it doesn't appear anyone tried to match contractors to failed wells. No one looked at enforcement. If the rules of the day had been adhered to and adequately monitored, we would not have all of these irretrievable pumps and our aquifer would be better protected.

And when the root cause isn't addressed, history has a way of repeating itself.

That is why I am before you today. To let you know that the purpose of the new regulations is good - to protect the aquifer, water quality, and well longevity. However, it appears the rule is not meeting the goal due to the same lack of enforcement through inspection.

What the rules HAVE done is doubled to tripled the price of wells. Our bids averaged \$79,000, with the highest being \$134,000. However, there were a couple of bids for \$15-20K less. Why not just go with them? Because I had done my homework, and I matched the bids to the regulation.

The bids from the lower-end contractors didn't list centralizers or upper steel casing or geophysical logging. One didn't list materials costs at all; and the other had steel priced less than half what everyone else bid.

These guys are not following the rules. And they're still not being inspected. So our aquifer is still not being protected. But they have 3 month waiting lists -- because they're still the cheapest option.

The cheap drillers who cause these problems are the ones benefitting from this regulation. They're lining their pockets and our wells will still fail and put the aquifer at further risk despite the best efforts with the regulation.

The root cause seems to be lack of inspection. The state has decreased its well inspectors and now only has 1 chief well inspector and 2 well inspectors for the ENTIRE state of Colorado! If there were more inspections, these low-end contractors could not

get away with poor quality construction that will have a devastating long-term impact on our water supply.

Today you face rapid expansion in Colorado. Our area is the Westminster and Broomfield, poised to explode. I can only imagine all housing will tap into the same aquifer – so it is incumbent on us to keep that water healthy.

We have this new regulation in place to protect wells – but we don't have inspectors in place to ensure it's being followed. What sense is that?

Increased regulation without increased inspection is futile.

The high cost of the regulation is driving people to low end solutions that will result in wells that STILL don't last generations. And that would be a tragedy to these homeowners and to this aquifer – our only source of water. As I said when I started, your committee holds one of the most powerful roles in the future of this state -- you are the stewards to protect this finite resource. Please put the inspectors in place to ensure it lasts.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jennifer Whiting', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jennifer Whiting