

Testimony of a CSG worker [#auspol](#)

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I contacted the Gasfield Community Support group after hearing Laurence Springborg saying on the radio that no workers in the CSG industry had become sick, and the air and water tests were good quality.

I started in the industry in 2008, and worked for 3 ½ years on a mobile drill rig. Initially I was employed by... Mitchell drilling who were taken over by AJ Lucas. With the exception of one well, at all other times Mitchell drilling /AJ Lucas were contracted to Santos. I was employed as the "offsider" initially, graduating to senior drillers assistant. One of the tasks was mixing chemicals into the mud pits to pump down the drill string. There were different polymers used. They pumped "mud" down the drill string. (Salt water, KCL and polymer JK261, (a lubricant)). On an average lease, if they were not taking losses, you would use an average of 12 tons of KCL and 15 pallets (720 drums /10,800kg of polymer) to keep the viscosity up and lubricate the drill bit. The polymer was mixed in the pits through a hopper. The polymer had to be sprinkled into the hopper and it was blowing in the face, in the eyes; we were constantly breathing it in. This happened for hours at a time. We had masks, with

a diaphragm sometimes, otherwise paper. The masks were also used when mixing the cement for the casing if Halliburton did not come in and we were doing the cement job ourselves.

When drilling down, going through the Permian or Jurassic riverbeds which were very permeable, sometimes the drilling muds would disappear. They could take huge losses We took core samples when Santos told us to. They took core samples on every drill hole, usually about 600 metres in depth. 80% of the time they got pretty good returns- getting most of the returns back up the drill into the pits. But 20% of the time, especially in Fairview, east of Injune, they couldn't stop the losses.

They could use approximately 20 tons of KCL (semi-trailer loads full) with water. There was 50,000 litres of water in each of three pits. On one rig, in a 12 hour shift we used 27tons of KCL along with 100,000 litres of water and multiple other chemicals. The next 12 hour shift would then come on and this could go on for days doing exactly the same thing until the losses were stopped. They would use 9.4 heavy- saturation point- lots of KCL, JK261, CR650-polymer. The KCL was to "weigh down" the gas bubble. When they were taking losses they would use 'frac seal fine', composed of silver paper, coarse saw dust, trying to fill the hole, to block it. They tried to stop the loss by plugging the hole. They would use maybe 10 different chemicals including bentonite, they would keep pumping down, trying to fill the losses. If the muds were going disappearing) gases could be coming in; they had to try and block it off with a different medium, and keep pumping it down the drill string to seal the hole. They tried to weigh down the gas bubble. They were worried about gases coming back in and the risk of explosion; it was a very dangerous time and happened often (maybe 20%of the time)

In the Gunnedah basin south of Coonabarrabran, they drilled a hole and hit the fresh water aquifer, Fresh water was pouring out of the hole, diluting the salt content. They had to bring trucks in to take the water away; they put the casing in and tried sealing it off with cement on the outside of the drill string. There were problems in the Gunnedah basin because the aquifers were close to the surface, they had to get through the aquifers and keep drilling to get to the coal seam. They got a drill string stuck in one particular hole. They brought in black stuff in a 1000 litre container, called "pipe free". I'm not sure how it worked. I think they pumped it down the drill string to try to free up the soil and recover the expensive equipment from the hole. It stunk to high heaven. It was very smelly, dangerous: we were told not to get any on our skin. It happened in a hole in Fairview; Santos owned the property near Injune. On every fifth hole or so they got stuck but could get the tool free without major problems apart from patience and time. But if the tool sheared off they fished for the tool or cemented the hole up and moved on a couple metres, cutting their losses and started drilling again. (This happened about three times when I was there but there was only one time they used "pipe free".) It is a big problem for them and expensive if they lose tools down the hole.

Weatherfords did the logging. They used radiation sources. I heard that they had lost tools down the hole, but not at the time I was there.

At times there were problems with the end plug with gas bubbling through the cement, they couldn't stop it. There were bubbles coming up through the water that was sitting over the cement in the cellar. I saw it three or four times.

On Fairview, there were lots of drill holes, it was like a porcupine. Drill holes could be as little as 150 meters apart at times, at other places kilometres apart. There are now a lot of production wells there.

I started getting sick, with nose bleeds on a regular basis in 2011. I had never had a nose bleed in my life before. My work schedule was- out for 18 days, home for 9 with 2 days travelling out of it. (I am an organic farmer, totally self-sufficient and solar powered, and I was trying to set myself-up for older life. I was working out there for the money. I was cautious about saying anything- I had lost a job before for speaking out). I was better when got home on days off; when I went back out, again there was blood dripping from my nose. I had nose bleeds in the shower.

We broke up earlier than expected at the end of 2011 because of wet weather. I was coughing and couldn't clear my chest. I went to the doctor in late November/ early December. He listened to my lungs and sent me for a CXR.

I had a terrible feeling of anxiety and just felt terrible. The anxiety was there all day from the minute I woke up to when I went to bed. I was sent for a CT scan and told I had moderate emphysema. I had only smoked for a couple of years, age 19 and 20, not since. I looked up the internet and seen Dr Roger Allen near the Wesley. I did a test lasting 6 hours and had a lung biopsy. I was told I had inflammation, lung infection, bronchitis. I wanted compensation, adamant that the cause was what I had been using at work. Dr Allen wouldn't commit to what

was causing it. I had sick benefit for a couple of months- I was off for a couple of months then they told me I was fit to work. I wouldn't go back to mixing chemicals; they told me there was nothing else for me- got nothing for me. They wiped their hands of me. Now I am back on the farm. I am not coughing as much. I still haven't 100% capacity in my lungs. I have cough and phlegm and loss of lung function. When I was working on the rigs I would have spasm of my hands. I would grab a set of stilsons to do up a drill joint, when trying to let go I couldn't open my hand. I had to use the other hand to open the knuckles back up. There was lead based grease, real thick grease, used on the drill joints, also a zinc based grease called ZN50. The young fellows I was working with here getting it all over themselves. It is carcinogenic. They were using 20kg buckets in a 10 day period. The other driller, age 27, had bad skin. It looked like dermatitis. He had red skin around his eyes and hairline. It would look better each time he came back from break. We lost contact.

A lot of people are out of work, with a downturn in the industry.

It was a 24 hour rig, 12 hour shift, 4 on crew, driller, and senior offsider, 2 junior offsiders. There was always a crew on break. Apart from the people you work with you don't know other people.

There were big camps. We lived in camps or hotel accommodation, up to 80% of the time in camps. People complained about the water at times. The truck just didn't look hygienic. The water was next to the septic tank which overflowed several times. People were getting stomach bugs. - I am unsure if the drinking water was bore water. Santos took the drinking water away a couple of times because of complaints. The water in the mud pits was recycled to the next lease for drilling.

The drill cuttings went back into the pits. When in the Gunnedah basin they started lining the pits with big plastic liners. They didn't tend to line them in Queensland. There were hundreds of tons of cuttings. It was a problem. I'm not sure what happened to the pits, or the plastic or the cuttings.

When we were out there, if there was 4 inches of rain the salt water in the pits started flowing over.

If they knew the rain was coming, they would try and pump the mud out and dump it somewhere else like in new pits Santos planted fodder trees, not Australian natives. I think they planted them to get rid of coal seam gas water by using it for irrigation. There were maybe 10,000 acres that Santos planted. That then became a problem. Now seeds have washed out and are growing on the sides of the road, in waterways. They have become a pest now.

The industry took off very quickly; it went from a controlled Australian industry with a few different Australian companies and rigs, to overnight rigs coming in from Canada, Mexico, everywhere.

Whatever controls they went through in the past seemed to have disappeared over night.

When I worked in the Gunnedah basin, there was lots of protest by the locals,

and road blocks to go through. There were also open cut coal mines being licenced to overseas buyers (particularly the Chinese) who were buying the land up. The farmers didn't like it. Because of the protest our image had to be squeaky clean and there was a lot more control on the industry than in Queensland. Problems with farmers were not such a problem in Western Queensland. There was an occasional well on their property, maybe up to 10 wells on big properties. Santos was building a big airport. I didn't see any protest by farmers in Queensland. It was not a problem on big properties. Santos and Origin own some big properties.

Arcadia Valley, north of Injune is a magic pristine country of big aboriginal significance. It is a rift valley, with a huge escarpment and caves. It shouldn't have been touched, it should be heritage listed.

Aj Lucas had one rig in the Arcadia valley and disturbed sacred aboriginal sites. There were maybe six holes. There was no more or no less care than in Fairview. I think it was a shame. The wastage was immense. In a 12 hour shift 2000 litres of diesel was used just for an exploration rig. (For the production rig to get the gas out of the ground, the fuel usage would be astronomical.) In addition to the drilling, there were air conditioners and generators running all the time. There were 100's of rigs in the area. There were diesel spills and leaks.

Other waste, Industrial bins full of plastic drums were emptied twice a week; there was a huge amount of food wasted.