

The Tawakoni Camp for the Environmentally Ill



The story of the EI camp near lake Tawakoni, Texas. It was open for just one year.

Keywords: chemical sensitivity, MCS, electrical sensitivity, environmental illness, housing, trailer park, travel trailer, caravan, Tawakoni

Dr. William Rea in Dallas, Texas owned a ranch east of Lake Tawakoni, about sixty miles (90 km) from Dallas. One of his neighbors owned a ten-acre (4 hectare) wooded lot that was bordered by a forest preserve on two sides and by ranch land on the other two. He was skilled at many sorts of repair jobs and was nearing retirement, so he was looking for something that was light work he could do for income in retirement. Dr. Rea suggested he build housing for the environmentally ill on his land and then rent it out.

Dr. Rea's neighbor will be referred to as Mr. A in the following.

2 *Tawakoni Camp*

Mr. A invited a group of people from the Dallas MCS community out one day in early 2001 to take a look and give him advice. This writer was a member of that group. We got a tour of the heavily wooded lot, which had a small pond in the middle and an unused mobile home. The mobile home was smelly and musty and not usable for MCS housing.

Mr. A explained his idea of building four cabins of concrete blocks to rent out, though he wasn't aware of how involved it really is to make housing for people with severe MCS. During the visit he decided to start simpler by first building some trailer sites and later building the cabins once they learned more. This was a wise decision.

He started developing the land soon after. He cleared five camp sites that were spaced at least a hundred feet (30 meters) apart to limit problems between the campers. He installed a septic sewage system between two sites, with lines going to both sites. Underground electric and telephone cables were brought in for three of the sites. More work would be done as the sites became occupied.

The first renters were a married couple who were living in Dr. Rea's housing. The wife had severe MCS and light electrical sensitivity. Her husband was healthy and had a lot of experience with construction work. They bought an older Avion travel trailer and modified it to be safe to live in. To heat the trailer in the winter he installed a hydronic (hot water) heating system with an electric water heater and circulation pump in an enclosure outside the trailer. They did this to avoid electric space heaters and the trailer's gas heating system.

They also installed a washer and dryer nearby, which were initially covered by a tarp.



The free-standing porcelainized room. It had a tiny bathroom.

Soon after, a woman moved to the adjacent camp site. She bought a portable room made of porcelain-on-steel plates, which she had transported to the camp on a flatbed trailer (see picture).

Later that summer, a woman came and camped in her car on a campsite without sewage hookup. She used the empty mobile home as her bathroom, but couldn't really spend any time in this moldy and stinky structure. She did not have money to buy a trailer, so they built her a small primitive garden shed of corrugated steel with insulation of Reflectix (alu-covered plastic bubble-wrap). She also had an electric space heater and an electric refrigerator in there.

It was a two-hour drive to the nearest Whole Foods health food store in Dallas. There was always someone who needed to go see Dr. Rea or otherwise go to Dallas each week and the four people managed to help each other with organic groceries. But the distance was a real problem, and a deterrent for others to move out there.

There was a small company in Dallas that did shopping at Whole Foods and delivered to people's homes. It was originally started to serve people with MCS living in Dr. Rea's housing and in the Seagoville MCS camp. By 2001 it had grown and mainly catered to upscale people too busy to shop themselves, but the

4 *Tawakoni Camp*

owner never forgot the MCS community. However, Tawakoni was too far for his delivery vehicles. He did consider the idea of flying in groceries twice a month, as he owned a small plane he loved to fly. He would then give the Tawakoni people a price break, as he would consider it partly a hobby. These discussions didn't go any further as the Tawakoni camp never grew beyond four people and he needed more to make it financially viable.

Another problem was that some highly electrically sensitive people felt bad in the camp once it became developed. This was a mystery at the time, but was not a problem for those who lived there.

Years later, this writer inspected the electrical installations and found the likely explanation. The wiring was not done correctly, which very likely created massive ground currents. (The neutral and ground were connected in every pedestal and panel, which allowed the neutral current to go through the soil.) At this visit the camp was abandoned and the power turned off, so the amount of actual ground current could not be measured.

The camp operated for about a year, from spring 2001 to fall 2002. There was some sort of conflict between the owner and one of the renters, who apparently sued the owner. The owner then decided to close down the camp and the four renters had to move out. The nature of the conflict or its legal outcome is not known to this writer.

Other housing stories

Additional stories about EI rentals can be found on www.eiwellspring.org/multiunit.html.

2017