

Pressure Regulation & Control - Odor Fade - Important Safety Bulletin

An Important Safety Bulletin from the Northeast Gas Association with regards to Natural Gas Odorant

The purpose of this notice is to provide customers and natural gas piping, appliance and equipment contractors with additional safety information on natural gas odorant and the potential for odor fade.

Northeast Gas Association members that are gas suppliers, transmission, and local distribution pipeline operators adhere to the United States Department of Transportation (DOT) and their respective state regulators' rules and regulations regarding the odorizing of natural gas. Even though a distinctive odor is added to natural gas to assist in the detection of leaks, you should not rely solely on your sense of smell to determine if a gas leak exists or if natural gas is present. Some persons may not be able to detect the odorant because they have a diminished sense of smell, experience olfactory fatigue, or the odor is being masked by other odors in the area. In addition, certain conditions such as "odor fade" may cause the odorant to diminish so that it is not detectable.

Odor fade (loss of odorant) occurs when the concentration of gas in the air is not readily detectable to smell. The level of odorant in the gas is reduced due to physical and / or chemical processes, including adsorption, absorption and oxidation. In gas piping systems, odor fade occurs predominantly in installations of new pipe rather than in existing pipe. It is more pronounced in new steel pipe of larger diameters and longer lengths. However, it can also occur in plastic pipe and in smaller and/or shorter pipe installations. New pipeline installations or additions of new piping segments may require the conditioning of the pipe before it is placed into service to prevent occurrences of odor fade. If a natural gas leak occurs underground, the surrounding soil may cause odor fade. Other factors that may cause odor fade include conditions related to the construction and configuration of the customer's gas facilities; the presence of rust, moisture, liquids or other substances in the pipe; and gas composition, pressure and/or flow. Intermittent, little or no gas flow over an extended period of time may also result in the loss of odorant until gas flow increases or becomes more frequent. Many appliance manufacturers include in their installation manuals information on the potential for odorant fade.

Customers and contractors are warned to take heed of the following recommendations:

Do not purge the contents of a gas line into a confined space. Purging of a gas line should only be done by a licensed, qualified professional and should be done in a well-ventilated area or by venting the contents to the outside atmosphere. Always use gas detection equipment during purging operations or when otherwise working on gas piping systems, to ensure that no natural gas is present that may result in a combustible or hazardous atmosphere.

Do not rely on your sense of smell alone to detect the presence of natural gas. Consult your local plumbing code, mechanical code, fuel gas code and/or your department of building and safety for more information. When installing gas appliances or equipment, the manufacturer's instruction manual should be followed in accordance with the local code authority.

For additional information on natural gas safety, please visit our website: www.northeastgas.org