May 20, 2014

Hon. Kathleen H. Burgess  
Secretary  
New York State Public Service Commission  
Three Empire State Plaza  
Albany, New York 12223-1350


Dear Secretary Burgess:

The Northeast Gas Association¹ (NGA) appreciates the opportunity to submit this report in response to the February 20, 2014 order (Order)² issued in the above referenced proceeding.

This document provides the results of the LDCs’ public and local government outreach collaborative (Collaborative). The report’s appendix identifies concrete improvements each LDC will consider making to increase customer understanding of the need to report gas odors and the new initiatives each utility may adopt to educate local governments about excavation practices.

On May 8, 2014, during a meeting of NGA’s NY Advisory Committee, the Commission’s request was communicated to the NY LDCs present that discussions on residential methane detection technology and notifying the public of the location of leaks on gas systems be included in the Collaborative report. The findings from these discussions are included in this report.

The following are the Collaborative’s findings.

¹ NGA is a regional trade association that focuses on education and training, technology research and development, operations, planning, and increasing public awareness of natural gas in the Northeast U.S. NGA represents natural gas distribution companies, transmission companies, liquefied natural gas importers and associate member companies. Its member companies provide natural gas service to 10 million customers in 8 states (CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, RI, VT).

I. Recognizing and Responding to Gas Odors

Representatives of New York State’s gas LDCs conducted several meetings (on March 20, April 1 and April 28, 2014), phone conversations and correspondence with the facilitation of NGA, to discuss the PSC recommendation to identify outreach and education related to recognizing and responding to natural gas odors. At these meetings, the New York LDCs focused their discussion on current effective programs that the companies and NGA have in place to address public awareness issues as they relate to natural gas safety. New initiatives to be considered were also identified.

Recent results from New York State public awareness effectiveness regional surveys were reviewed during these sessions. The survey responses indicate that the public’s awareness of the appropriate ways to detect natural gas ranges from 86% to 93%. The Collaborative focused on identifying best practices with regard to educating the public to recognize and respond to natural gas odors and leaks. The results of the Collaborative’s efforts are identified below. Challenges in reaching certain audiences and motivating them to take action were also discussed.

Current Programs / Initiatives Undertaken by Individual Companies and NGA

- Annual gas safety brochures and bill inserts are sent by utilities to customers. These provide important messages related to gas safety, such as how to recognize a gas leak and what actions to take, as well as who to contact immediately after relocating to a safe location. These brochures also provide information on calling 811 for mark-outs prior to digging on a property.
- Gas odor scratch and sniff brochures are also mailed to customers by many companies. These provide a simulation of the “rotten egg” odor (mercaptan) added to natural gas and the importance of calling the gas provider or 911 immediately from a safe location upon the detection of an odor. Some companies mail this annually to all customers while others do so on a less frequent basis.
- Some companies mail scratch and sniff inserts or brochures to all new customers.
- Where there are significant non-English-speaking populations, some companies provide non-English brochures upon request.
- Some brochures/inserts include a block of foreign languages that recommend that the reader have the enclosed information translated.
- Many companies participate in NGA’s annual pipeline safety public awareness TV/radio/online campaign, which extends to all major media markets in New York State and includes messages on recognizing and responding to gas leaks. Some companies have their own media campaigns. This initiative is intended to reach non-gas customers, e-bill customers and those who don’t read brochures. “If you smell gas” instructional videos are provided on some company websites.
- Email blasts are deployed by some companies to communicate gas safety messages, including video messages, to reach electronically billed customers and customers who do not read brochures.
Gas safety messaging is incorporated in company social media communication strategies.

Some companies provide educational outreach on gas safety to school children in order to prompt family gas safety discussions when children take the information home.

Many companies provide annual mailings to contractors regarding safe excavation practices, including the importance of calling 911 and the gas provider immediately if there is damage to a gas line or if they detect a gas odor or leak.

Mailings are also sent to public officials on gas safety, including the importance of recognizing and responding to gas odors and leaks.

Programs to Consider in the Future

- Develop regional safety videos and make them available for all companies to use on their websites, or distribute via email or other means. NGA can assist with this initiative.
- Have service personnel distribute gas safety information when responding to a service call.
- Add a QR (Quick Response) link to brochures and inserts to provide additional information online.
- Provide town/community meeting presentations on gas safety, including the importance of recognizing and responding to gas odors and leaks.
- Include gas safety information at additional community events (for example, county/town fairs and street fairs).

Potential Perceived Barriers That Deter the Public from Taking Action

The participants also discussed and identified some potential perceived barriers that may deter some members of the public from taking action in the event of a leak. These include the following:

- Concern that reporting would lead to a loss of service (heat, hot water, cooking) in the building/residence and/or expensive repairs to customer piping.
- Loss of anonymity.
- Concern about creating a nuisance investigation.
- Perception that someone else will call.
- Smelling a gas odor is not a major concern.

The Collaborative agreed that future next steps would include developing and testing messages through focus groups and other methods, drawing from urban, suburban and rural environments, as well as non-English speakers. Effective message delivery approaches will also be tested.

Methane Detectors

Current research initiatives and activities related to methane detectors were discussed. Although there are flammable gas detectors that are available on the market, NGA, as
well as the New York LDCs, believe that work is required to evaluate the reliability level of these types of detectors for natural gas detection. NGA and participating New York LDCs plan to study the reliability of current residential methane detectors, as well as evaluate the ongoing research and development efforts of NYSEARCH toward improvements in the design of residential methane detectors. If results from these efforts are positive, a plan may be developed to advocate for the use of residential methane detectors.

Customer Notification on the Location of Gas Leaks

The Collaborative understands the desire for more information related to leak location. However, the participants of this collaborative had not discussed this issue prior to May 8, 2014. Therefore, NGA and the utilities are not able to provide an in-depth discussion of this issue in this report.

It is critical to make information available in a manageable way that does not raise undue concern and confusion as well as potentially undermine public awareness efforts. NGA and the New York LDCs have identified some preliminary concerns related to notification of gas leaks. For example, publicly reporting the location of such leaks that are determined not to cause an immediate danger to the public could lead to confusion and complacency among the public, and may act to dissuade the public from reporting leaks in the vicinity of identified leak locations. This, in turn, could result in the public not reporting new leaks or existing leaks in those areas that have become a more serious threat.

The Collaborative understands that Con Edison, a Collaborative member, has agreed to a pilot program regarding making leak information available to the public. Con Edison will plan to address the various concerns and review them with the New York State Department of Public Service (NYSDPS) before initiating the pilot program. New York LDCs will receive the results of this pilot for review and evaluation.

Gas Emergency Phone Number

The merits of promoting a unique gas emergency phone number or 911 for reporting gas odors or leaks were discussed. The consensus among the participants was support for promoting both the existing company gas emergency number and 911, when and where it is viable to do so. It is noted that Collaborative members, Con Edison and National Grid, have met with the FDNY, at the request of New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio’s administration, to explore 911/FDNY as the primary receiver/responder to all reports of gas leaks in New York City.

II. Educating Public Officials Regarding the Issue of Third Party Damages

Summary

Representatives of New York LDCs have held several meetings (on March 20, April 2 and May 6, 2014), phone conversations and correspondence to discuss educating public officials on the potential hazards related to excavations near gas facilities. The utilities
were joined by representatives of DigSafely New York and New York Call 811 on May 6. The New York LDCs identified a consensus list of outreach initiatives to consider that are targeted at public officials with the objective of reducing third party damages. Companies are considering including these initiatives in their overall damage prevention programs. Recommended changes to enforcement practices for the NYSDPS are also identified in this document.

Exploration of Outreach Initiatives for Utilities to Consider

- Leverage existing New York one-call center damage prevention safety videos and target them to public officials and government agency personnel, highlighting the consequences of ignoring their duty to take proper precautions and identifying their responsibilities.
- Leverage regional face-to-face and online training/education programs for public officials to be developed in partnership with New York one-call centers.
- Provide comprehensive damage prevention communications to municipalities regarding:
  - Tolerance zones
  - Hand-digging
  - Proper use of air lances and other technologies to eliminate damage to gas pipes.
- Conduct face-to-face meetings with municipalities that have high instances of contractor damage.
- Copy the project owner (municipality – town supervisor, highway superintendent, etc.) on correspondence and invoices regarding damage to utility facilities inflicted by contractor(s) retained by municipalities for public improvement projects.
- Participate in municipal construction meetings with contractors on projects where damages have occurred.
- Urge municipalities to investigate contractor damage prevention training certification lists with New York one-call centers prior to adding contractors to their bid lists. Work with the one-call centers to provide this information to municipalities.
- Perform annual mailings seeking information on public improvement projects from municipalities and counties, and conduct follow-up meetings.
- Offer to participate at meetings that town supervisors, superintendents and commissioners attend (for example, county-wide and statewide organizations), to emphasize damage prevention and public safety.

Enforcement Policies

The following are recommended enforcement practices for the NYSDPS to consider adopting:

- Attain commitment from New York State top leadership to communicate safety messages to public officials through the NYSDPS.
• The damage prevention enforcement Staff of NYSDPS should communicate directly to municipalities regarding their responsibility to make efforts to ensure that their contractors are following regulations and using proper excavation and backfill practices around natural gas pipelines.
• Eliminate municipal immunity from one-call violations and fines.
• Revise NYCRR 753.36(b) to require excavators to expose existing gas lines that will be crossed when the excavation comes within 15 feet of the gas line.

Conclusion

NGA and the New York gas LDCs appreciate the opportunity to present these findings. We hope that our efforts will help the Commission in the administration of this case. Please contact us if you have any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

[Signature]

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