



San Bruno

Lots of you have asked questions about details of the recent gas explosion in San Bruno, California. This destructive and dramatic explosion made the news across the nation due to the loss of life and property resulting from the incident.

Facts will continue to come out over time, but as of now here is what I've found reading news stories on-line:

- The line was operated by PG&E Corporation, one of the nation's largest utilities with 15 million gas and/or electric customers in Northern California
- The line was 30" in diameter, with an MAOP of 400 psig
- I haven't seen anything definite on whether the gas was odorized, but there have been multiple reports of people smelling a gas odor before the explosion
- PG&E has stated that it took 1 hour 46 minutes to get the gas shut off
- Eight people died as a result of the incident
- 37 homes were destroyed

What does all of this mean to us? After all, there are no municipal operators in Minnesota operating pipe 30" in diameter, and few of you operate anything at pressures approaching 400 psig.

I suspect that this incident will have a big impact on the regulations that we comply with in operating pipeline systems. For example, the people who live in the area of the explosion have reported smelling gas before the explosion. Can the pipeline operator document that they responded correctly to these reports?

Bills have already been introduced in Congress in response to this tragedy. Some of the proposals include increasing the number of pipeline safety inspectors, requiring installation of automatic (remotely operated) valves in certain locations, and increasing the fines for violating pipeline safety regulations. It's impossible to predict the outcome, but it seems safe to say our industry is on track to becoming even more closely regulated.

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Code Corner

Safety-Related Conditions-we've all heard this phrase, at least at inspection time, but what does it really mean, and when do we have to file a Safety Related Condition Report?

For answers to these questions, we turn to code, specifically Part 191. 191.23 requires operators to report the existence of safety related conditions, for example, unintended movement or abnormal loading by environmental causes. This includes things like floods, landslides, or earthquakes that "impair the serviceability of a pipeline". Another example is a malfunction or operating error that causes the pressure of a pipeline to rise above its MAOP plus allowable buildup. One final example is a condition that could lead to an imminent hazard and causes a 20 percent or more reduction in the operating pressure of a pipeline.

Are there reasons why a Safety Related Condition Report would not be required in any of these cases? Yes. Some of these include the condition that results in an incident prior to the deadline for filing the Safety Related Condition Report. In that case you would replace the SRCR with an incident report. Also, if you correct the condition before the report is due (usually 5 working days) you would not have to file the report.

These conditions are very rare. It's highly unlikely that you will have to do this, but be aware that if you the instructions are in your O&M Manual or Emergency Plan. I'm also willing to help if you have questions.

Safety

Fall is a busy season for all of you. Sometimes when there is a lot of work to do and it seems like not quite enough time to do it, shortcuts can be appealing.

Don't take shortcuts on safety. Even if it takes a little longer, follow procedures and document the work you do. It will make your life much easier in the long run, and most important, it will help prevent accidents.