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ALLSTON BRIGHTON

Leaky Allston gas mains repaired after drawing concern

Posted by Matt Rocheleau October 22, 2010 02:44 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Reported leaks of underground gas mains along an Allston roadway have caused concern among some residents, who fear the leaks and the pipeline's age may raise the risk of an explosion like the one that devastated a California neighborhood last month.

However, National Grid officials said that the company has been aware of, repairing and monitoring the leaks, as well as testing for additional leaks in the natural gas pipes below North Beacon Street. A company spokesman also said the pressure of natural gas traveling through the pipes the roadway is "several hundred pounds below the pressures that were being used," in San Bruno, Calif.

"The underground facilities, the gas mains [on North Beacon Street], in no way are anywhere near what was going on in San Bruno out in that transmission line," said spokesman David Graves.

Allston residents have been discussing the leaks recently on a neighborhood e-mail listserv, along with the inaccurate fear that the pipes are high-pressure lines like the one that burst in California.

"It freaks me out every time I walk by there - which is multiple times a week," wrote one resident worried that the pipeline situation may be "potentially disastrous."

Two gas pipes run below the spot on North Beacon Street – one a 24-inch diameter intermediate line with a maximum pressure of 25 to 30 pounds per square inch, and another six-inch diameter line with even lower pressure, Graves said. The exact age of each pipe was not immediately known, but since they are made of cast iron – a material that was more common before pipe makers began using lighter, less-cumbersome steel or a plastic material for smaller diameter pipes – they are believed to be decades old.

The nearly 55-year-old steel pipe in San Bruno was a 30-inch diameter transmission line with a maximum operating pressure between 375 and 400 pounds per square inch, according to an investigation report by the [National Transportation Safety Board](#).

When the San Bruno pipeline ruptured on the evening of Sept. 9 in a residential area of San Bruno, it left a 72-by-26-foot crater and launched a 28-foot segment of pipe 100 feet away, said the transportation board's report.

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Released natural gas ignited shortly after the rupture killing eight and causing many, including dozens of injured people, to be evacuated from the area. The gas fire also destroyed 37 homes and damaged 18 others.

The most recent work on North Beacon Street has been to fix three resident-reported leaks – one in late September, a second in early October and the most recent, ongoing fix began on Oct. 15 and should be complete “in a matter of days,” said Graves.

Earlier this summer prior to a city repaving project, National Grid performed “an extensive leak detection survey” in the area to avoid having to make potential repairs after the road’s resurfacing, said the spokesman in an e-mail.

Twelve leaks – none of which the company believes had been reported beforehand – were reported and subsequently repaired either immediately or within several days along about a one-third of a mile stretch of road from the Cambridge Street intersection to where it meets with Dustin and Hitchborn streets, said Graves.

Leaks that were not repaired immediately did not present an immediate danger and were monitored until they were fixed, he said.

The recent leaks were found in joints along both gas mains and one leak was in a valve. The joints were repaired or replaced as necessary; the valve was replaced, the spokesman said.






“Leaks occur for any number of reasons including movement of the pipe due to nearby construction, extreme frost conditions that cause the pipe to move, third party (construction) dig-ins which may or may not be immediately noticeable or corrosion (on untreated steel mains),” said Graves, adding though that “There is no clear reason why these joints might have leaked.”

The report on the San Bruno tragedy said the pipeline’s explosion may have been attributed to a malfunction in the gas line’s power supply system at a terminal nearly 40 miles away where work was being conducted. The malfunction caused the loss of electrical signal to the regulating valve of the line that ruptured. The valve moved from partially open to fully open, which caused a rise in pressure, the report said.

Though pleased the problem area is being addressed, Allston resident Edward Dong, 76, who started the neighborhood e-mail chain on the topic said he remains concerned over the site’s leaks and what he described as a potential for the pipeline’s regulator at 5 North Beacon St. – which is protected by a steel, locked access door on the sidewalk – to be tampered with.

Graves said the company does air testing of its entire system annually to inspect for leaks, and “We continuously remind the public to please call 800-233-5325 if they smell gas.”

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