



## **Natural Gas Pipelines & Public Safety A Guide for Public Officials in Virginia**

Each day, an underground network of over one million miles of pipeline safely carries natural gas from supply areas to customers' homes, businesses and factories across the country. While the natural gas industry has a proven record of safety, an on-going working relationship with excavators, contractors, emergency responders and public officials is essential to maintain the safe operation of this important energy delivery system.

As a public official, your awareness of pipeline safety measures is vital to your community. Please read this guide carefully to familiarize yourself with its helpful preventive measures and response information for natural gas emergencies.

### ***Pipeline Safety***

Underground pipelines in the United States are regulated by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous materials Safety Administration (PHMSA). This department establishes rules and standards governing the design, construction, operation, maintenance and safety of interstate pipelines. The Division of Utility and Railroad Safety of the State Corporation Commission is the enforcement agent for PHMSA in Virginia.

At Columbia Gas of Virginia, providing safe reliable service to the communities we serve is a top priority. We are committed to keeping the public and our natural gas pipelines safe. Our gas control and monitoring center operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We regularly patrol our pipeline rights of way and conduct regular inspections of our pipeline system. In addition, we make a significant investment each year to replace and upgrade our pipeline infrastructure.

Columbia Gas of Virginia operations employees receive regular training and are qualified under U.S. Department of Transportation standards for natural gas pipeline operators and are on-call at all times to respond to emergencies.

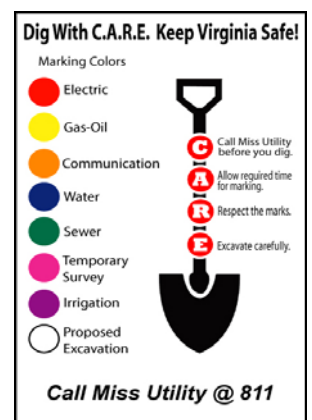
### ***Emergency Preparedness***

A team effort between emergency responders and natural gas pipeline companies is vital when an incident occurs. Columbia Gas of Virginia sponsors excavator and emergency responder training sessions throughout its service area each year. These meetings provide excavators with information they need to prevent pipeline damage and what to do in the event an incident does occur. These meetings also provide emergency responders with important information on how to respond to a natural gas incident.

### ***Call 811 Before You Dig***

Pipeline damage is most frequently caused by excavation projects conducted without prior location of underground utility lines and failing to protect buried utility lines during excavation. While these incidents often result in traffic and other disruptions, dig-ins may also result in property damage, costly repairs, personal injury or even loss of life.

Excavators – whether professional or weekend warriors – must call 811 -Miss Utility - in advance of excavation project. It's also important to call Miss Utility at 811 when planning to cross pipeline right with heavy equipment or to perform blasting in the vicinity of any pipelines. Representatives of Miss Utility will take the caller's project information and instruct member utilities to mark their underground facilities. Once underground utility lines have been marked, it is important to hand dig within two feet of the marks to ensure safe excavation.



## Recognizing Gas Leaks

While third-party damage is the largest single cause of pipeline failures, natural gas leaks due to corrosion or other causes can occur. Look, listen and smell to detect gas leaks.

Look for:

- Dirt being blown or appearing to be thrown in the air
- Water bubbling or being blown into the air in a creek, pond or river
- Fire coming from the ground or appearing to burn above the ground
- Dead or dying vegetation on or near a pipeline right of way in an otherwise green area
- A dry or frozen spot on the right of way

Listen for hissing, blowing or a roaring sound. And, use your sense of smell to detect the familiar “rotten egg” smell of natural gas. If you suspect a natural gas leak, leave the area immediately and dial 911 and call our emergency line at 800.544.5606. If natural gas lines have been damaged or natural gas is escaping from the underground pipelines immediately dial 911 from a safe location and then call Columbia Gas of Virginia at 800.544.5606.

## How to Tell Where a Pipeline is Located

To help identify our pipelines, we sometimes use markers placed at intervals along pipeline rights of way. Markers display 24-hour emergency telephone numbers and might provide other identifying information. It is important for you to be aware of pipeline markers in your community. It is against federal law to destroy or tamper with pipeline markers. If a pipeline marker is compromised in any way, call the pipeline company shown on the marker to report the damage.



In addition to pipeline markers, government officials can access the National Pipeline Mapping System at [www.npms.phmsa.dot.gov](http://www.npms.phmsa.dot.gov). This geographic information database allows users to view interstate pipelines in any given state and find out the name of the company that operates a particular pipeline.

## Land Use Decisions & the Public

Most pipelines were installed many years ago in sparsely populated areas. Since then, many of these areas have become densely populated with houses, apartments, shopping centers and businesses. Great care must be given to protect the public and the environment from the unlikely event of a pipeline incident. A right-of-way is the land where a pipeline is buried.

A right-of-way encroachment review should be completed if a job requires work in or around a right-of-way. This review needs to be completed to ensure that buried utilities, excavators and the public are protected. This includes not only excavations, but also driving heavy machinery over buried pipelines as well. The weight of these machines can crush buried facilities or cause substantial damage and future fatalities.

Before any type of land development, it is a good idea to notify the pipeline companies that operate in the area and work with them in the early stages of project development to avoid costly delays or accidents.

| <b>Columbia Gas of Virginia<br/>CONTACTS</b>            |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Emergency Line (24 hours)</b>                        | <b>800.544.5606</b>                          |
| <b>Customer Service</b>                                 | <b>800.543.8911</b>                          |
| <b>Bob Innes<br/>Communications/Community Relations</b> | <b>804.768.6410<br/>rinnes@nisource.com</b>  |
| <b>Timothy Beeler<br/>Compliance Manager</b>            | <b>804.768.6450<br/>Tbeeler@nisource.com</b> |
| <b>Andy Stone<br/>Operations Center Manager</b>         | <b>540.368.3230<br/>astone@nisource.com</b>  |

More natural gas safety information can be found at: [www.columbiagasva.com](http://www.columbiagasva.com)

Or write us at  
**Community Relations**  
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November 2010