

# Yankee Gas Services Company Update: Natural Gas Safety\*

## **SUMMARY.**

The natural gas pipeline system is the safest transportation system in the nation, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation. The natural gas industry spends approximately \$4 billion each year to ensure the safety of its infrastructure and as a result the rate of natural gas accidents continues to decline each year. In New England, the safety record of natural gas is excellent; the last decade has seen an average of six accidents per year, resulting in an average of fewer than three injuries per year.

Natural gas is extremely safe as a heating fuel, resulting in fewer house fires than electric or oil heat. The overwhelming majority of accidents result from excavators engaged in improper digging. The state-mandated "Call Before You Dig" program continues to be effective in preventing unsafe excavating by contractors and other third parties.

## **SAFETY IN THE HOUSEHOLD.**

Natural gas is a safe and efficient fuel that can be used for residential heating, cooking, clothes drying, and other tasks. It also has many applications in the commercial and industrial sectors. Natural gas itself is colorless and odorless. It is not poisonous or toxic. Its trademark rotten egg scent is the result of an odorant added to natural gas as it enters the local gas companies distribution systems. When released into air, natural gas usually dissipates harmlessly. Only when it accumulates in confined spaces can it displace enough air to become hazardous.

When natural gas burns completely, it produces carbon dioxide and water vapor, the same substances exhaled when you breathe. Incomplete combustion of natural gas can produce carbon monoxide (CO). Devices such as carbon monoxide detectors, now a standard feature in most homes heated by natural gas, alert residents to the buildup of carbon monoxide.

To reduce the risk of CO poisoning, natural gas users should make certain that chimney and vent pipes are opened and unobstructed. Proper ventilation of natural gas burner areas is also very important, especially following renovations or if the heating system is in an enclosed area. Routine maintenance of natural gas appliances is also a necessary safety precaution.

## **SAFETY IN THE FIELD.**

Most natural gas accidents and injuries result from improper digging around natural gas mains. In Connecticut, there is a one-call system known as Call Before You Dig (CBYD). State law requires excavators to notify the CBYD clearinghouse at least two full working days before a project involving power or mechanical equipment for excavation can begin.

The CBYD law is important because it protects excavators and the public from serious injury resulting from ruptured natural gas mains. It also requires utilities to maintain a current file with CBYD on underground facilities such as natural gas mains and to work with excavators to make sure underground facilities are properly marked.

CBYD is a state-regulated nonprofit organization composed of all public utilities and municipalities within the state of Connecticut. For more information on CBYD guidelines or safety seminars offered by CBYD, call 800-922-4455.

#### **FEDERAL AND STATE GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT.**

The Natural Gas Pipeline Safety Act was passed by Congress in 1968. It requires the Secretary of Transportation to establish minimum safety standards for the transportation of natural gas. At the State level, public service commissions that regulate local gas utility rates may also have the authority to enforce federal pipeline safety standards. In Connecticut, the Department of Public Utility Control (DPUC) regulates local natural gas distribution companies. Such agencies may also impose additional safety requirements if local conditions (such as earthquakes, floods, etc) justify them.

#### **IN THE EVENT OF AN EMERGENCY.**

The principal source of natural gas emergencies is unauthorized and improper digging. When natural gas is smelled inside a residence or commercial building the following steps should be taken:

1. Alert others and leave the area.
2. Leave doors and windows open but do not take the time to open them if they are closed.
3. Do not operate any electrical switches including telephones or flashlights.
4. Call your local gas company from a telephone outside the area

where natural gas was detected. The Yankee Gas 24-hour gas leak emergency number is 1-800-992-3427. 911 operators also will know how to direct emergency calls. 5. Stay away from the area until the natural gas company or public safety officials determine that it is safe to return.

#### **SAFETY TRAINING.**

Safety is a high priority with Yankee Gas. The Company participates in ongoing safety training with interstate pipeline companies and offers training to local public safety officials.

The Company's goals are to protect the public and its employees, prevent damage to property, and, in the event of a service shutdown, to restore service as soon as possible.

\*For more information on this issue and other energy-related matters, contact Yankee Energy through the company's website at [www.yankeenergy.com](http://www.yankeenergy.com). Other sites with useful information on natural gas safety include [www.aga.com](http://www.aga.com) and [www.nega.com](http://www.nega.com).