



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: APR 28 1999

In reply refer to: P-99-9

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About 2:33 p.m. on July 21, 1997, a 20-inch-diameter steel natural gas transmission pipeline owned and operated by Citizens Gas & Coke Utility Company (Citizens Gas) ruptured and released natural gas near an intersection adjoining the Charter Pointe subdivision in Indianapolis, Indiana. The gas ignited and burned, killing one resident and injuring another. About 75 residents required temporary shelter. Six homes were destroyed, and about 65 others sustained damage significant enough to be documented by the local investigation team.

The pipeline had not been under full internal pressure since March 31, 1997, when the pressure was reduced to approximately 30 pounds per square inch gauge (psig) in anticipation of road construction work in the area.¹ On May 19, 1997, Miller Pipeline Corporation (Miller), under contract to Citizens Gas, had performed a directional drilling operation to install an 8-inch-diameter natural gas distribution main parallel to the transmission pipeline. About 1 hour and 40 minutes before the rupture, Citizens Gas had begun to return the 20-inch transmission pipeline to full service.

The National Transportation Safety Board determined that the probable cause of this accident was the failure of Citizens Gas and Miller to have adequate controls in place to ensure that directional drilling operations carried out in the proximity of existing underground facilities would not cause damage to those facilities.

On-site inspection of the ruptured pipe revealed a near-longitudinal gaping fracture about 5.8 feet long. Along the entire length of the longitudinal fracture, the newly installed 8-inch steel distribution main was located within approximately 4 inches of the 20-inch transmission pipeline.

Safety Board examination of the ruptured segment of the 20-inch pipe revealed that the pipeline fractures contained features typical of overstress separation. The exterior pipeline surface along the entire length of the longitudinal fracture contained circumferential gouge marks that

¹ The road construction work required that Citizens Gas relocate an adjacent section of its 20-inch transmission pipeline. In view of the reduced seasonal demand for natural gas, the company decided to reduce the pressure on the pipeline and discontinue using it to transport gas during the period of construction.

intersected both halves of the fracture. The gouge marks typically measured approximately 4 inches long in the circumferential direction. Wall thicknesses in the deepest area of two gouge marks adjacent to the longitudinal fracture were 0.168 inch and 0.175 inch, which were 60 and 62 percent, respectively, of the original 0.281-inch wall thickness.

Safety Board investigators obtained a tooth from the reaming tool that was used in the drilling operation to install the 8-inch distribution main in the vicinity of the rupture. Direct comparisons of the tooth with the gouge marks revealed that the size and shape of the tooth tip were consistent with the size and shape of the gouge marks in the vicinity of the rupture.

Citizens Gas construction plans called for an approximately 200-foot-long section of new 8-inch distribution main to be installed parallel to the 20-inch pipeline with a horizontal centerline-to-centerline separation of approximately 5 feet along most of its length. Before drilling began, Citizens Gas personnel used paint to mark the approximate location of the 20-inch pipeline at intervals of 15 to 20 feet.² Two excavations, one to verify the location of some utility cable crossings and another to serve as an exit pit for the directional drilling operation, exposed the 20-inch transmission pipeline and thus verified its location.

Miller drilling personnel stated that field measurements indicated that they could maintain an approximate 5- to 7-foot horizontal separation between the new installation and the paint marks used to indicate the location of the existing 20-inch transmission pipeline. The drilling crew intended to maintain this separation throughout the bore except for one location near the termination of the bore where, in order to avoid an underground telephone duct, the pipeline separation would need to be reduced to an edge-to-edge horizontal distance of about 1 foot.³

The Miller crew consisted of two persons, a foreman and a machine operator, utilizing a Vermeer directional drilling rig with a 5-inch-diameter drill head and a 14-inch-diameter reaming tool. The foreman said that throughout the directional drilling operation, he monitored the location and alignment of the pilot drill head every 5 to 10 feet with a “walkover” detector. He said he marked the drill head’s location at these intervals as the boring operation progressed to the east. If course corrections were needed, the foreman said, he relayed instructions back to the machine operator via a headset radio. Miller personnel did not report any difficulty in performing the drilling operation, nor did they note any other unplanned deviations from a straight line path. During the back-reaming process, the location of the reaming tool was not tracked as it was during drilling.

After the accident, the two pipelines were excavated at points along the bore path to determine the exact horizontal centerline-to-centerline separation between the pipelines and the depth of cover over each one. These excavations revealed that the 8-inch distribution main was located at a horizontal centerline-to-centerline distance of 5.5 feet north of the 20-inch

² Indiana State Code (IC 8-1-26-2) defines *approximate location* as “a strip of land at least four (4) feet wide but not wider than the width of the facility plus two (2) feet on either side of the outer limits of the physical plant.” See Safety Study—*Protecting Public Safety Through Excavation Damage Prevention* (NTSB/SS-97/01) for further discussion.

³ The actual separation would be greater than 1 foot, since the pipelines were to be at different depths at this particular location.

transmission pipeline at the entrance point of the bore (west end). Progressing eastward, the location of the 8-inch distribution main veered sharply toward the 20-inch transmission pipeline. Approximately 40 feet east of the entrance point of the bore, the 8-inch distribution main was within a few inches of the existing 20-inch transmission pipeline. At the rupture site, approximately 68 feet east of the entrance point of the bore, the two pipelines were about 4 inches apart. As the 8-inch pipeline continued toward the east, it veered away from the 20-inch pipeline to a horizontal centerline-to-centerline separation of 3.3 feet about 113 feet east of the entrance point of the bore. From this point eastward, the horizontal centerline-to-centerline separation ranged from 4 to 6 feet until the 8-inch distribution main angled toward the 20-inch transmission pipeline at the east end of the bore, as originally planned.

Citizens Gas had procedures in place at the time of the accident that were applicable to general construction activities in proximity to its pipelines, but it did not have procedures specific to directional drilling operations. Citizens Gas has provided to the Safety Board copies of procedures that it has now adopted that are specific to directional drilling in proximity to existing pipelines. These procedures include a requirement that, whenever directional drilling operations are carried out parallel to and within 10 feet of an existing transmission pipeline, spot holes will be excavated at 25-foot intervals so that the exact location of the drill head can be visually determined. These spot holes will also allow personnel to verify pipe alignment as the pipe is installed during the back-reaming process.

Miller has also provided the Safety Board with procedures it has adopted to provide additional protection for existing facilities during the company's directional drilling operations.

Title 49 *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR) Part 192.614⁴ requires gas pipeline operators to develop and follow a written program to prevent damage to their pipelines from excavation activities. Excavation activities include boring operations. In light of the ever-increasing use of horizontal directional drilling, the Safety Board is concerned that accidents similar to the one in Indianapolis may occur in the future unless operators take precautions to protect their facilities. To address this concern, the National Transportation Safety Board has made the following safety recommendation to the Research and Special Programs Administration:

When reviewing pipeline operator safety programs, ensure that the operators' damage prevention programs include actions to protect their facilities when directional drilling operations are conducted in proximity to those facilities.
(P-99-1)

In the meantime, the Safety Board believes that pipeline system operators and pipeline contractors should take the initiative to ensure that their internal procedures provide adequate protection for existing pipelines during nearby directional drilling operations. Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board makes the following safety recommendation to the Directional Crossing Contractors Association:

⁴ Title 49 CFR Part 195.442 contains similar provisions for operators of pipelines transporting hazardous liquids.

Inform your members of the circumstances of the July 21, 1997, pipeline rupture and fire in Indianapolis, Indiana, and provide them with recommended safe practices to prevent damage to existing underground gas pipeline facilities during directional drilling operations. (P-99-9)

Also, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations P-99-1 to the Research and Special Programs Administration, P-99-2 to the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, P-99-3 to the American Gas Association, P-99-4 to the American Public Gas Association, P-99-5 to the Interstate Natural Gas Association of America, P-99-6 to the American Petroleum Institute, P-99-7 to the Association of Oil Pipe Lines, P-99-8 to the Distribution Contractors Association, P-99-10 to the North American Society for Trenchless Technology, and P-99-11 to the National Utility Contractors Association.

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency with the statutory responsibility "to promote transportation safety by conducting independent accident investigations and by formulating safety improvement recommendations" (Public Law 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any action taken as a result of its safety recommendations. Therefore, it would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendation in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendation P-99-9 in your reply. If you need additional information, you may call (202) 314-6201.

Chairman HALL, Vice Chairman FRANCIS, and Members HAMMERSCHMIDT, GOGLIA, and BLACK concurred in this recommendation.

By: Jim Hall
Chairman