

Log P-35 Not 14-15 Proc. P-75 15

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

FOR RELEASE: 6:30 A.M., E.S.T., NOVEMBER 14, 1975

(202) 426-8787

ISSUED: November 14, 1975

Forwarded to:

Mr. H. F. Steen
President
El Paso Natural Gas Company
P. O. Box 2185
American General Building
Houston, Texas 77001

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

P-75-15

At 12:30 a.m., CDT, on October 13, 1975, the personnel on duty at the El Paso Natural Gas Company's (El Paso) gas processing plant at Goldsmith, Texas, heard gas leaking from a pipe. Five employees began a search for the origin of the leak. At 12:45 a.m., a 12-inch pipe ruptured, and gas roared at 550-psig pressure through the now-open end of the 12-inch pipe and ignited violently seconds later. Three of the five employees were killed, and two were burned and hospitalized.

The blazing gas caused the inlet scrubber piping to fail, so that flaming liquid hydrocarbons were blown over the top of one of the plant's compressor buildings and onto a cooling tower.

The blast shattered windows in nearby houses and flames could be seen for 20 miles. Firefighters from Andrews, Kermit, Monahans, and other towns battled the blaze until it was under control at 3 a.m. Smaller fires fed by pockets of natural gas were allowed to burn out. Some persons in the town of Goldsmith were evacuated by the local fire department as a precaution.

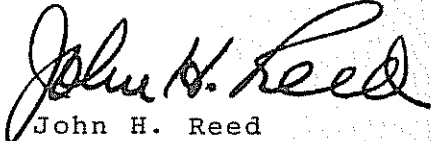
The plant was shut down because of damaged piping, valves, and other equipment.

Subsequent investigation by the Safety Board revealed extensive internal corrosion in the stub end of a 12-inch line used to transport natural gas from El Paso's compressors to a natural gasoline plant one-half mile away. Hydrocarbon liquids, hydrogen sulfide gas, carbon dioxide gas, and some water had collected in this dead-end pipe, which extended about 10 feet.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the El Paso Natural Gas Company:

Examine the wall thickness of the existing piping in areas of potential liquid accumulation at the Goldsmith plant and at other gas processing plants or take other remedial action to insure that similar conditions for potential pipeline failure are not present.
(Class I, Urgent followup).

REED, Chairman, McADAMS, BURGESS, and HALEY, Members, concurred in the above recommendations. THAYER, Member, was absent, not voting.


By: John H. Reed
Chairman

cc: Honorable William T. Coleman, Jr.
Secretary of Transportation

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