

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: December 9, 1977

Forwarded to:

Mr. L. D. Santman
Director
Materials Transportation Bureau
Department of Transportation
Washington, D.C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

P-77-41 and 42

At 1:36 a.m., e.s.t., on January 25, 1977, a low-order explosion and fire destroyed a house in a residential area near Williamsport, Pennsylvania; the occupant was not seriously injured by the explosion. 1/

At 1:44 a.m., the fire chief of the Old Lycoming Township Volunteer Fire Department, which had responded to the fire, requested that the Pennsylvania Gas and Water Company (Penn Gas) be notified of the fire and explosion. Because the serviceman assigned to emergency calls lived in a town 20 miles away, and it would have taken him 45 minutes to reach the scene of the accident because of heavy snow, a local serviceman was dispatched from Williamsport at 1:55 a.m. At 2:01 a.m., firemen again notified the gas company of strong odors of gas at the accident site.

The local serviceman arrived about 2:10 a.m. in his personal vehicle without the necessary tools and equipment to deal effectively with the gas emergency. He concluded that, since there was no gas service into the house that exploded, the gas main was leaking. He telephoned his dispatcher for a street crew at 2:15 a.m.; he also drove to the gas company shop for a combustible gas indicator (CGI) and other work tools.

At 2:39 a.m., a few minutes after the street crew arrived, another explosion demolished a large house 70 feet away. A resident of the house and a bystander were killed by the explosion; several persons, including 19 firemen, were injured. Automobiles, a firetruck, and many houses within a one-block radius were damaged severely.

1/ For more detailed information about this accident, read "Pipeline Accident Report--Pennsylvania Gas and Water Company, Natural Gas Explosions and Fires, Williamsport, Pennsylvania, January 25, 1977" (NTSB-PAR-77-4).

On October 1, 1976, 49 CFR 192.615(c)1 was revised to require that each gas system operator maintain liaison with appropriate fire, police, and other public officials to "... learn the responsibility and resources of each government organization that may respond to a gas pipeline emergency."

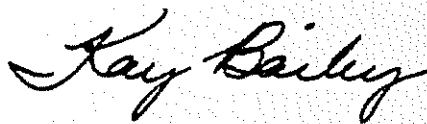
Gas companies often provide training to regular fire department personnel and thereby know of their capabilities and resources. However, there are thousands of volunteer fire departments in the country that cannot be trained during normal industry working hours. The firemen of these departments could benefit from a nationwide uniform training course on hazardous pipeline materials.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Materials Transportation Bureau of the U. S. Department of Transportation:

Extend its Emergency Services Training Course contract to include a section on the hazardous materials aspects of flammable pipeline materials such as natural gas and liquid hydrocarbons. Coordinate and cooperate with the American Gas Association, the American Petroleum Institute, and the Interstate Natural Gas Association of America to use their expertise in this area.
(Class III, Longer Term Action)(P-77-41)

Instruct all Office of Pipeline Safety Operations regional compliance offices and state agents to inspect gas companies under their jurisdictions for compliance to the amended 49 CFR 192.615 (emergency plans) effective October 1, 1976. Particular attention should be given to the provision that requires that the gas company train its appropriate operating personnel to assure that they are knowledgeable of the emergency procedures and how the company tests its employees to verify that the training is effective. (Class II, Priority Action)(P-77-42)

BAILEY, Acting Chairman, McADAMS, HOGUE, and KING, Members, concurred in the above recommendations.



By: Kay Bailey
Acting Chairman