

Log P-75 Not 2097 Rec P-77-15

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: July 11, 1977

Forwarded to:

Mr. Alan A. Butchman
Acting Director
Materials Transportation Bureau
Washington, D.C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

P-77-15

At 3:15 p.m., on March 13, 1977, an explosion destroyed a house at 325G Hoon Street in Monongahela, Pennsylvania. One person was killed by the explosion and another person was hospitalized.

The Equitable Gas Company (Equitable) was notified of the accident at 3:31 p.m. and company personnel arrived at the site at 3:40 p.m. Equitable reported the accident by telephone to the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission at 8:15 p.m. on the same day.

Equitable notified the Office of Pipeline Safety Operations (OPSO) by telephone at 11:40 a.m. on March 14, 1977, more than 20 hours after the accident and more than 15 hours after the Public Utility Commission was notified.

OPSO notified the National Transportation Safety Board of the accident by telephone at 11:55 a.m. on March 14, 1977. A Safety Board investigator arrived at the accident site about 6:30 p.m. that evening, more than 27 hours after the explosion.

This 27-hour delay hampered the Safety Board's ability to obtain first-hand, eyewitness statements, to evaluate the extent of gas leakage, and to determine the source of the leak.

The late notification of this accident to the Office of Pipeline Safety Operations is not unique. The Safety Board has investigated 12 pipeline accidents involving Equitable and other companies in 1977 to date; 3 accident notifications were from 4 days to 1 month late, and an average of 10 hours elapsed between the accident and its notification in the other 9 cases. The earliest notification was 4 hours after the accident.

Title 49 CFR 191.5, Telephonic Notice of Certain Leaks, states the following:

"(a) At the earliest practicable moment following discovery, each operator shall give notice in accordance with paragraph (b) of the section of any leak that --

- (1) Caused a death or a personal injury requiring hospitalization;
- (2) Required the taking of any segment of transmission pipeline out of service;
- (3) Resulted in gas igniting;
- (4) Caused estimated damage to the property of the operator, or others, or both, of a total of \$5,000 or more; or
- (5) In the judgment of the operator was significant even though it did not meet the criteria of subparagraphs (1), (2), (3), or (4) of this paragraph.

(b) Each notice required by paragraph (a) of this section shall be made by telephone to area code (202) 426-0700 and shall include the following information:

- (1) The location of the leak
- (2) The time of the leak
- (3) The fatalities and personal injuries, if any.
- (4) All other significant facts that are known by the operator that are relevant to the cause of the leak or extent of the damages."

In a letter to all operators of gas pipeline facilities and State agencies dated January 29, 1971, the Acting Director of the Office of Pipeline Safety (now OPSO) stated that ". . . in most cases this telephonic report can and should be made within one to two hours after discovery." This letter was responsive to a condition which existed at that time and which continues to exist.

In the March 1977 Pipeline Advisory Bulletin, OPSO reported that pipeline companies should telephonically notify OPSO within 1 to 2 hours after discovery.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Office of Pipeline Safety Operations of the Materials Transportation Bureau:

Enforce the notification requirements as stated in 49 CFR 191.5, in view of the continuing noncompliance of pipeline operators. (Class I, Urgent Followup) (P-77-15)

TODD, Chairman, BAILEY, Vice Chairman, McADAMS, HOGUE, and HALEY, Members, concurred in the above recommendation.



for By: Webster B. Todd, Jr.
Chairman

Enclosure