

https://www.bakersfield.com/news/pipeline-operator-fined-over-arvin-gas-leak/article_91c29fcc-2da9-5be3-9239-822ced6a0c26.html

Pipeline operator fined over Arvin gas leak

BY CHRISTINE BEDELL AND JOHN COX cbedell@bakersfield.com, jcox@bakersfield.com

Feb 19, 2016



The area of a gas pipeline leak in Arvin that displaced more than three dozen people for some eight months in 2014.

Henry A. Barrios / The Californian

A state regulator has fined Petro Capital Resources \$75,000 over a gas pipeline leak that forced about three dozen people from their homes for more than eight months, it was announced Friday.

The Division of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources found the pipeline operator “failed to test, operate and/or maintain oilfield production facilities in accordance with good oil field practice” and it raised “significant potential for harm” to people and property.



Not only that, it determined, Petro Capital failed to prepare an adequate pipeline management plan because it didn't include any testing method for its pipelines, including the underground polyethylene pipe that caused the leak to occur sometime before it was detected in 2014.

"At the time the gas flare pipeline leak was detected in March 2014, the pipeline was approximately 40 years old and understood to be located in close proximity to a residential neighborhood," an order released by DOGGR Friday says.

"Nonetheless, PCR had not tested or performed any maintenance on the gas flare pipeline (or its other buried pipelines) on the Jewett or Richards leases, and PCR had no record of any repair, inspection or testing history for this or any other pipeline on the leases by the prior operators."

It says neither DOGGR nor PCR knows how long the gas flare had been leaking, but subsequent testing showed significant amounts of gas had contaminated the soil above, below and near the gas flare pipeline and had seeped into eight nearby residences on Nelson Court.

A spokesman for Petro Capital Resources did not respond to emails seeking comment.

It was in early 2014 that residents of Nelson Court, just off Mahin Drive in Arvin, started complaining of gas smells, headaches and other problems, prompting the Kern County Fire Department to begin testing their homes. In March the department determined eight houses contained highly explosive levels of gas, and the residents were evacuated.

Petro Capital Resources LLC, which owns the pipelines, paid for some of the families to live in Bakersfield apartments during an investigation. PCR also shut down the waste gas pipeline and paid for a human health risk assessment.

Although the company later declined to release results of the assessment, Kern County officials did disclose them. The testing showed high levels of at least two toxic chemicals, benzene and naphthalene.

Soon the residents learned the state's primary oil regulatory agency, DOGGR, had never tested the pipeline because it was less than 4 inches in diameter. It turned out no government agency was responsible for testing such equipment.

In December the residents were allowed to move back in after being assured there was no longer any leak-related health risk in their homes.



DOGGR says Petro Capital Resources can appeal the order to the director of the Department of Conservation. If it doesn't, the order will become final and the penalty amount will become due.

If the pipeline operator fails to comply with the DOGGR order, the agency can order it to cease operations and even request it be criminally prosecuted.

"Our main objectives as the regulators of California's oil and gas industry are to ensure that public health and safety as well as the environment are protected," State Oil and Gas Supervisor Ken Harris said in a statement. "The Division has worked with Assemblymember (Rudy) Salas' staff on legislation to improve the response to future leaks, although naturally we hope to prevent such incidents by creating new and more stringent regulations, and more frequent testing and inspections."

MORE INFORMATION



JOSE GASPAR: Two years later, Arvin families still seeking answers

Salas bill would delineate responsibilities in wake of Arvin pipeline leak

Oil company involved in Arvin gas leak investigated for oil tank emissions



JOSE GASPAR: Displaced Arvin residents happy to be back home for Christmas

Residents want reassurance another gas leak will not occur in Arvin

State officials: Arvin homes toxic gas free

After eight months, Arvin gas leak testing process moves forward

Oil company to stop paying temporary housing of Arvin evacuees

County officials say evacuated homes are safe, despite incomplete testing

