



# What You Should Know about Natural Gas Risers

Updated October 2007

This publication is updated quarterly.

In November 2006, the staff of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) issued a report on a statewide investigation into the installation, use and performance of natural gas risers. Natural gas risers are the vertical portion of the service line that connects the primary distribution pipeline to the customer's meter.

The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility consumer advocate, is participating in the case at the PUCO and has some concerns about the findings in the report.



customer base to determine what types of risers are installed in each of their service areas. Also, the staff recommended that each company provide additional training to all qualified riser installers to limit the number of incorrect installations that occur.

## Riser Inventory Request

On Jan. 2, the PUCO sent a letter to all of the local natural gas distribution companies requesting the utilities, at a minimum, begin surveying the natural gas risers that are in service on their systems immediately.

Additionally, the letter indicated an interest in beginning a discussion regarding the utilities taking over responsibility for the maintenance of the customer-owned service line in comments to be filed at the PUCO on Feb. 5. Currently, the homeowner is responsible for any part of the natural gas line and equipment that runs from the curb to the home.

On Jan. 23, another letter was sent by the PUCO to local natural gas utilities urging them to repair or replace any natural gas riser that may pose a dangerous threat or be susceptible to leaks that are found during the inventory and inspection process.

## Report Findings

Upon review of a sampling of natural gas risers throughout the major natural gas utilities' service territories, the report indicates that there is some risk with certain units under certain circumstances.

Risers with plastic connectors, those which had been exposed to severely cold weather during the installation process and risers that had been tightened incorrectly or improperly upon installation seem to be more likely to fail and risk a natural gas leak.

Consumers who have an inside natural gas meter are not affected by this issue because the meter is connected directly to the pipeline and no riser is used.

Natural gas risers are typically installed by a qualified plumber, not the utility. The utilities do conduct a final inspection of an installed riser and meter.

Plastic risers are typically located at residential homes while metal risers are commonly installed at business locations. Metal risers, if they fail, typically have slower leaks that can be identified and fixed before they become an issue. The report estimates that approximately 34 percent of all plastic natural gas risers in Ohio are the types of risers that are prone to leaks and failures, possibly when installed incorrectly.

In its report, the PUCO staff recommended that the natural gas companies conduct an inventory of their

## OCC Position

After reviewing the report, the OCC submitted recommendations to the PUCO including:

- ▶ Requiring only factory assembled risers to be installed. The report issued by the PUCO staff indicated that many of the faulty risers were installed at the customer's home during extreme cold weather conditions or when the riser was tightened improperly, causing seals to fail.
- ▶ Requiring all at risk new service lines, replacements or excavations at the curb to incorporate an excess flow valve on the service line. This valve helps to determine if a major or catastrophic leak has occurred by measuring the

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amount of natural gas that flows through the service line. A major leak would cause the valve to shut off the service line and the build up of natural gas near the home would be avoided.

- ▶ Requiring utilities that do not have records of risers in their service territory to conduct an inventory and visual inspection of risers assembled on location to check for improper tightening. Several companies do not have records of what types of risers were installed in their service areas. By having this information, it would be easier for the company to pinpoint which risers needed inspection and possible replacement. A visual inspection of the riser would help to determine if the riser was properly installed.
- ▶ Requiring leak tests be performed first in high risk areas. The data in the PUCO staff report indicates that many of the risers that failed were ones on service lines operating at higher pressures. By providing testing in the high risk areas, many of the leaks may be detected before causing increased safety issues for consumers.
- ▶ Ordering natural gas utilities to take ownership of service lines. Service lines are currently owned by customers. If the local natural gas utilities take ownership of the service lines, they would be able to determine the correct course of action in a timelier manner when faced with a leak.
- ▶ Prohibiting natural gas utilities from recovering additional costs for the survey, testing and reporting of riser failure. The OCC believes that the companies responsible for the operation, manufacture and installation of the risers should pay costs associated with the inspections of the current risers and replacements of the failing risers. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, the responsibility for inspecting the installation of the natural gas risers to ensure that they are installed correctly falls on the utility. Additionally, the utility is responsible for

the inspection of natural gas risers to document failures, corrosion, leakage history and other aspects that relate to the proper use of the pipeline that includes the riser. These rules also state that if a portion of the pipeline is determined to be in poor condition, but poses no immediate danger, the local natural gas company should develop a program to repair or replace the section with new materials.

The OCC is recommending that the PUCO require utilities to provide educational materials, at least twice a year, on the ways to detect a natural gas leak and the importance of reporting a leak to either the utility or the local fire department.

## Natural Gas Safety

Consumers should become familiar with the signs of a natural gas leak and report any concerns they may have to the natural gas company or their local emergency personnel.

While natural gas service is typically reliable, consumers can help reduce the possibility of accidents or safety issues with natural gas by being aware of their surroundings. Two safety guidelines include:

- ▶ If you smell a rotten egg odor (the scent that is added to natural gas) or hear the hiss of a leaking pipeline, leave the house immediately and call either your local fire department (9-1-1 in most areas) or your natural gas company.
- ▶ In some instances if the leak is in a pipeline outside your home you may see an area in your yard where the vegetation has died, water is bubbling or dirt is blowing, leave the house immediately and call either your local fire department (9-1-1 in most areas) or your natural gas company.

The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility consumer advocate, represents the interests of 4.5 million households in proceedings before state and federal regulators and in the courts. The state agency also educates consumers about electric, natural gas, telephone and water issues and resolves complaints from individuals. To receive utility information, brochures, schedule a presentation or file a utility complaint, residential consumers may call 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) toll free in Ohio or visit the OCC website at [www.pickocc.org](http://www.pickocc.org).

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**For additional information from the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel:**

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