

STATE OF NEW YORK

# Public Service Commission

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## **PSC URGES INCREASED GAS SAFETY EFFORTS**

**— Utilities to Review Risk Management Practices; Improve Public Outreach —**

Albany, NY – 02/20/14 – The New York State Public Service Commission (Commission) today, as part of its continuing effort to improve natural gas safety, directed gas utilities in New York to conduct a risk assessment of their distribution systems, focusing primarily on areas where third-party excavations might have occurred after the installation of gas pipes. Utilities will also develop best practices in terms of outreach on the importance of the public reporting gas odors to their local utility and informing local officials about the importance of proper excavation.

“The Commission takes its responsibility to ensure that customers receive safe and adequate utility service very seriously,” said Commission Chair Audrey Zibelman. “We can’t stress enough the importance of educating the public on the need to call their utility if they detect the odor of natural gas. We want the utilities to make renewed efforts and to find creative ways to remind the public that if you detect the odor of gas, leave the premise immediately, and call your utility right away.”

The Commission’s latest gas safety effort stems from its review of a natural gas explosion that occurred in Horseheads, Chemung County in 2011. In that instance, improper excavation practices by an unknown third-party many years ago may have contributed to an eventual break in the gas pipe that led to an explosion. In addition to the Commission’s concern about possible poor excavation practices, the failure to report the smell of gas odors in the weeks and days

leading up to the explosion reflects an urgent need for the local utility, NYSEG, as well as other utilities, to improve education efforts on the importance of reporting gas odors to the local utility.

Under State law, the Commission has general supervision and investigatory authority over New York's gas utilities and is obligated to ensure that every gas corporation provides safe and adequate service and facilities.

In keeping with this obligation, the Commission ordered the State's gas utilities to report findings of the risk assessments to the Commission in six months, followed by an action plan for addressing such risks, if needed. Utilities will also conduct a collaborative to develop best practices for continuing public education on reporting natural gas odors, and exploring new ways to reach local governmental entities to educate them on the potential hazards associated with excavations near gas facilities. Utilities will report back to the Commission on the results of the public outreach collaborative within 90 days.

Meanwhile, the Commission will continue to encourage consumers to learn the signs of a gas leak, including:

- Natural gas has no scent, so a strong odorant that smells like rotten eggs is added to help detect possible leaks. Consumers who are not aware of the smell of natural gas should contact their utility to request a free odorant card.
- The appearance of bubbles in standing water, dirt or debris blowing into the air, or vegetation that appears dead around the pipeline area.
- A hissing, whistling or roaring sound might indicate the possibility of a gas leak.

If a gas leak is suspected, the following steps should be taken:

- Evacuate everyone from your home or building immediately and leave the door open. Move away from the premises and call your utility from a safe location.
- Don't use or do anything that could create a spark, such as light a match, turn appliances or lights on or off, use a telephone or cell phone, ring a doorbell or start a car.

Additional tips on natural gas safety can be found on the Commission's website at [www.AskPSC.com](http://www.AskPSC.com).

The Commission's decision today, when issued, may be obtained by going to the Commission Documents section of the Commission's Web site at [www.dps.ny.gov](http://www.dps.ny.gov) and entering Case Number 11-G-0565 in the input box labeled "Search for Case/Matter Number". Many libraries offer free Internet access. Commission orders may also be obtained from the Commission's Files Office, 14th floor, Three Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12223 (518-474-2500). If you have difficulty understanding English, please call us at 1-800-342-3377 for free language assistance services regarding this press release.