



Annual pipeline inspections underway

Every year, NorthWestern Energy does leak surveys on our natural gas system. This includes gas main lines, service lines and gas meters.

In coming months, you may see NorthWestern Energy crews working throughout neighborhoods using leak detection equipment. These handheld units can detect traces of natural gas, which allows us to find leaks and get them fixed right away.

The NorthWestern crews will need to access your property to inspect your natural gas meter. If they can't reach your meter due to a locked gate or an animal in your yard, they'll come to your door and ask for access. If they can't get a hold of someone in the house, they'll send someone back later, so we can be sure to get a full inspection of the natural gas system.

Pipeline safety

In addition to being in your backyard, we are inspecting and monitoring the larger pipelines that deliver natural gas to your neighborhoods and communities.

Pipeline markers

Markers, placed at all public road and railroad crossings, show the approximate location of pipelines and identify the companies that operate them. These markers indicate the pipeline content, the name of the pipeline operator and the operator's emergency phone number.

Even if the pipeline is marked, you must call 811 at least two business days before any digging project to have utility lines marked. The pipeline may not follow a straight course between markers.

Pipeline monitoring

As a pipeline operator, we monitor the status of our transmission pipelines seven days a week, 24 hours a day to ensure they are safe and secure. We use computers, alarms, meters, local employees and satellite technology to control and check our pipelines. The monitoring systems detect changes in pressure and flow and can activate warnings and safeguards if a leak is detected.

HCAs and TIMPs

Federal pipeline safety regulations use the concept of High Consequence Areas, or HCAs, to identify specific locations and areas where an accidental release of natural gas could have the most significant adverse consequences. Once an HCA has been identified, operators devote additional focus to ensure the integrity of pipelines in that area. We have in place a Transmission Integrity Management Program, or TIMP, that defines the steps and timelines for identifying HCAs, assessing the integrity of the pipelines and taking aggressive steps to mitigate the risks to people and property near HCAs.

Pipeline purpose and reliability

Pipelines are the safest way to transport energy products, including natural gas, crude oil and other fuels. The U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline & Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) regulates pipelines with the help of state partners. According to government and industry statistics, the most common cause of pipeline incidents is improper or unauthorized digging near a pipeline, which is why it's important to call 811 before you dig. Pipeline operators carefully build, maintain and monitor the integrity and security of their lines.

How to recognize a natural gas leak

A gas leak is often recognized by smell, sight, or sound:

Smell — A distinctive sulfur-like or rotten-egg odor is added to natural gas, so you'll recognize it quickly. However, do not rely on your sense of smell alone to detect a natural gas leak.

Look — You may see dirt blowing into the air from a hole in the ground; continuous bubbling in water; dead or dying vegetation (in an otherwise moist area) over or near a pipeline; a damaged connection to a gas appliance; or an exposed pipeline after an earthquake, fire, flood, or other disaster.

Listen — You may hear a hissing, whistling, or roaring sound as natural gas escapes from a pipe.

If you suspect a natural gas leak, warn others and immediately leave the area. From a safe location at least 300 feet from the suspected leak, call 911 and NorthWestern Energy, any time, day or night.

The hazards of a natural gas release

Natural gas is very safe. However, if a natural gas leak occurs, you need to be aware of the hazards. Natural gas is highly flammable and easily ignited by sparks and static electricity. NorthWestern Energy makes it easy to detect natural gas leaks by adding an unpleasant rotten egg or skunk-like smell to natural gas. If you smell this odor:

- Leave the area immediately.
- Do not use phones, matches, light switches or anything else that could trigger the ignition of the gas.
- When at a safe distance, at least 300 feet away, call 911 and NorthWestern Energy.

Natural gas is lighter than air and can migrate into enclosed spaces. If you smell natural gas, evacuate the area on foot and move upwind of the leak.



Excess Gas Flow Valve Notice

If you have an existing gas service installed to your home, you have the option to purchase an Excess Flow Valve (EFV) to be installed by NorthWestern Energy. An EFV is intended to reduce the flow of gas if the service line is severed. The valve is placed in the service line where it leaves the gas main. If your gas service was installed after April 2017, you likely already have an EFV.

An EFV will reduce the flow of gas only if the service line is severely damaged. It is important to note that an EFV will not protect you from a leak or broken line inside your home, or a small leak on the line in your yard. An example of when the valve provides protection is in the event the gas service is damaged from digging or extreme ground movement.

As required by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), we are notifying you that an EFV that meets the minimum prescribed DOT performance standards is available for installation on your natural gas service line.

The cost of installing the EFV will need to be evaluated by an engineer. If you are interested, please call our construction line at 1-83-FOR-BUILD (1-833-672-8453). Payment is required prior to installation of the EFV.