

For Immediate Release: March 6, 2017

Contact: Martha Klein martha.klein@sierraclub.org, (860) 542-5225

Connecticut Gas Pipelines Leaky, and Ratepayers Bear Cost

Connecticut ratepayers are paying for natural gas leaks that are happening statewide. In Hartford alone, gas pipelines leak approximately 43,000 cubic feet per day, or 313 metric tons per year, enough gas to power about 214 U.S households annually. This corresponds to a likely statewide loss of millions of dollars each year.

A recent study commissioned by the Sierra Club of Connecticut found that the number of gas leaks identified far exceed the number of leaks that are reported to the Public Utility Regulatory Authority (PURA), the agency that oversees gas pipeline safety in the state. The Sierra Club study found a leak rate of approximately 3.2 leaks per road mile in the city of Hartford.

In general, academic research using precise measuring devices, such as the Picarro Cavity Ring-Down Spectrometer used in the Hartford study, finds more gas leaks than the estimates of regulatory agencies. In Boston, the number of leaks empirically identified by Boston University researchers was about double the estimate of a 2013 report filed by National Grid with Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities.

According to Gale Ridge, PhD, a scientist and researcher on the study, "In a one month period, we found about 700 leaks in Hartford. Over a one year period covering the same area, PURA reported 139 leaks. Even recognizing that some of the leaks we found are known to PURA, that's about a 5 fold difference. We believe that CNG may be missing a large percentage of its leaks."

Study researcher and founder of Gas Safety, Inc. Robert Ackley says, "These results are similar to what we've been finding all over the United States. The rate of natural gas leakage from pipelines is much higher than what the industry claims and what the regulators estimate. These companies could and should do more to prevent and repair leaks, but they don't. If it doesn't cost them anything to leak, they're going to keep doing it."

Why should natural gas leaks matter to Connecticut ratepayers? For two very important reasons: the economy and the climate.

Ratepayers are footing the bill for gas company leaks

Due to a 2014 law, PA 14-152, Connecticut ratepayers are paying for the gas that is leaked. The gas distribution companies estimate the amount of "lost and unaccounted for gas" that escapes from their pipelines, and then bill that back onto customers to recoup lost revenue.

Unfortunately, this practice discourages repair of leaks because companies are rewarded financially for leaking. It is perhaps more economically rewarding to gas companies to get paid for leaking than to invest in pipe repair and to save wasted tons of gas. It's estimated that the state of Massachusetts is losing about \$90 million per year in leaked gas. Based on the Hartford study, the Connecticut natural gas pipeline system is also leaky, and it can be estimated that our state is losing millions of dollars of value in wasted gas. Even worse, our bills are more expensive since we pay for natural gas that doesn't get used.

Natural Gas Causes Climate Disruption

Natural gas is 97 percent methane, the second most common greenhouse gas (GHG) in our atmosphere. Methane is an extremely potent GHG compared to carbon dioxide, and causes nearly 100 times the rate of global heating over the short term. The high leakage rate associated with methane extraction (fracking), and the continued leaks throughout the system, including pipelines, compressor stations and metering stations, which leak or sometimes intentionally vent gas, contribute to the terrible global warming potential of methane.

“We have a nearly bankrupt state economy, yet the state makes ratepayers, the working people of Connecticut, pay UI and Eversource for leaking fracked methane into our atmosphere,” said Martha Klein, Chair of the Connecticut Chapter of the Sierra Club, the organization that commissioned the Hartford pipeline study. “We already pay the cost for climate disruption, as we all paid to recover from the super storms a few years back. The energy giants UI and Eversource, who own all the local gas distribution companies in the state, get paid for leaking methane, making our electricity more expensive and our bills higher, while at the same time causing climate change from the emissions. It makes so much sense to require them to find and fix their leaks, and stop destroying the climate while at the same time protecting ratepayers from unneeded and excess costs.”

The state of Connecticut has an energy policy which is committed to expanding the use of natural gas, and transporting exponentially more gas across the state in massively expanded pipelines. Clearly, the rate of methane leaks is much higher than the state estimated, and they should take another look at the gas expansion plan. Otherwise, the state will suffer from increased GHG emissions and worsening climate.

Of potential interest to social and environmental justice groups, the Hartford gas leaks study data revealed a tendency for leaks to be repaired more quickly in certain areas, such as the business and downtown district, and more slowly in poorer residential communities. The worst leaks in Hartford were noted all along the length of Main Street.

The solution to this problem is probably legislative, and there should be a zero leak tolerance policy maintained for natural gas pipelines, as there is for petroleum pipelines. In the long run, Connecticut needs to ramp up its home grown renewable power, and run our electricity from safe, carbon free and inexpensive local wind, solar, and water power. In the short run, we could save our impoverished state budget and recoup millions of dollars of lost value, by repairing all the gas pipeline leaks now.

Hartford Comparative Leak Reports

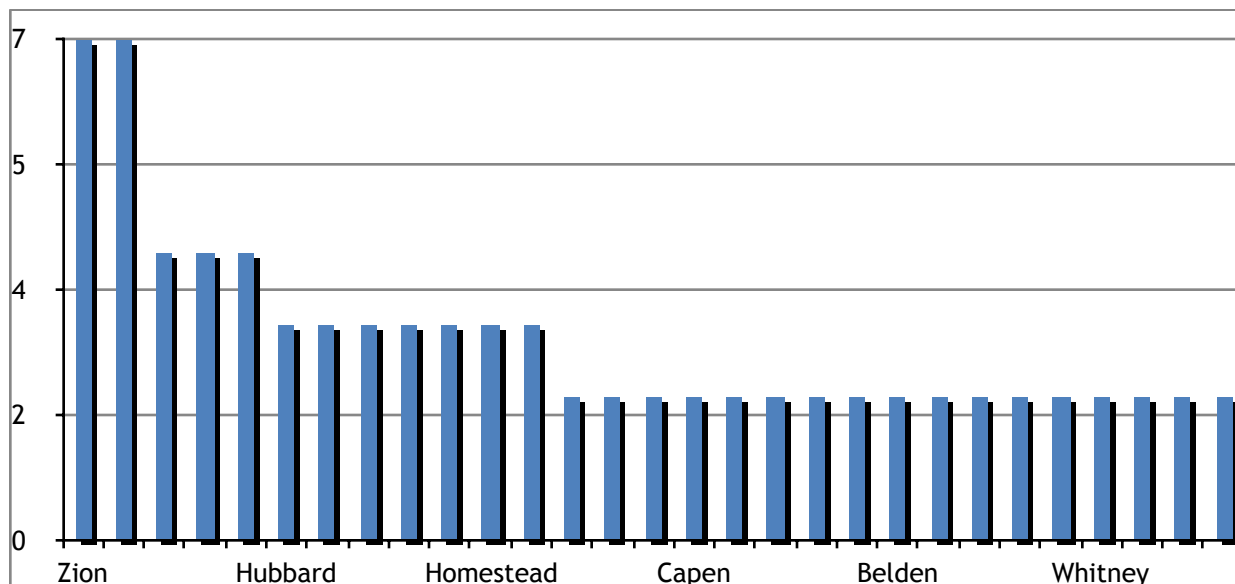


Figure 1. Reports To PURA– October 15, 2015 to October 17, 2016. Graph showing 7-2 highlighted is yellow. Totals are: 2 streets x 7 leaks; 3 (st.) x 4 (lk); 7 (st.) x 3 (lk); 17 x 2; 58 x 1 per street. **TOTAL 139.**

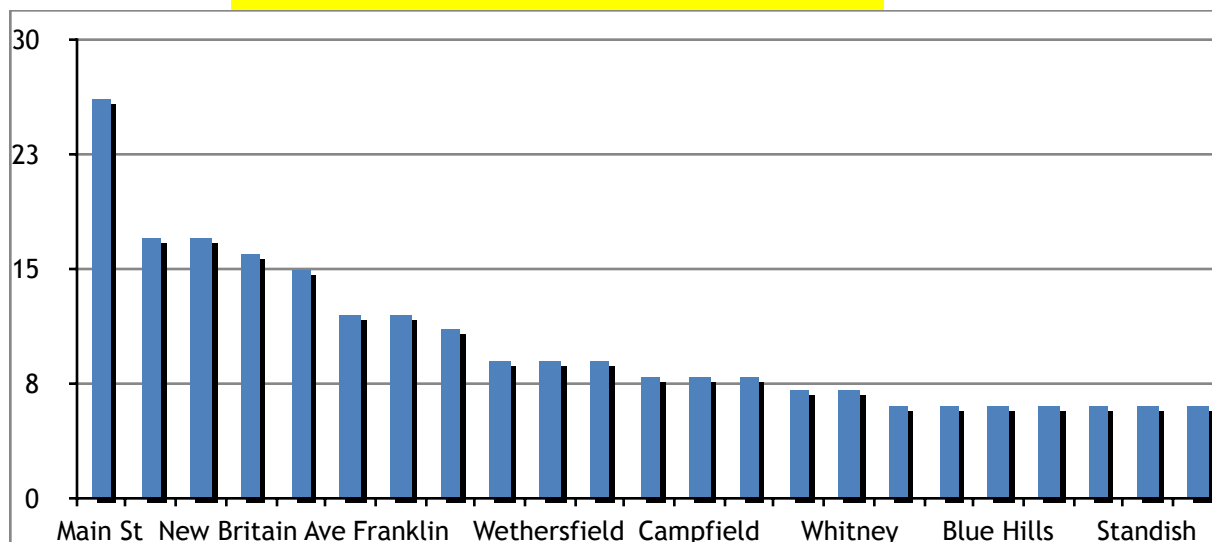


Figure 2. Tests by Gas Safety Inc. - February 25, 2016 to March 31, 2016. Graph showing 26 – 6 highlighted in yellow. Totals are: 1 streets x 26 leaks; 2 streets x 17 leaks; 1 x 16; 1 x 15; 2 x 12; 1 x 11; 3 x 9; 3 x 8; 2 x 7; 7 x 6; 14 x 5; 21 x 4; 33 x 3; 2 x 48; 1 x 122 per street. **TOTAL 704.**