

Home sampling

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California's major natural gas utilities will initiate PCB sampling of air and natural gas in homes in the San Francisco Bay, Los Angeles, and San Diego service areas, under a cooperative program being conducted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC).

The residential sampling effort, which will include a small number of selected homes under plans approved

by EPA and the CPUC, is the latest step in a nationwide program to identify and correct PCB contamination of natural gas pipelines.

The presence of PCB in natural gas pipelines was first discovered in January by the Long Island Lighting Company of New York when pipeline liquids (condensate) clogging home gas meters were analyzed and tested positive for PCB. After the subsequent testing of pipeline condensate by several New York area distribution companies and three transmission companies supplying gas to the area also showed PCB contamination, EPA instituted a national sampling program to determine the extent and possible source of PCB contamination of oil in natural gas pipelines across the country.

Based on the results of this testing, a number of states including California were identified as having an oil PCB contamination problem, and remedial measures programs were implemented.

The overriding concern throughout the pipeline contamination program has been whether the use of natural gas from contaminated lines poses a risk to human health. Sufficient information on the extent and location of contamination of California's pipelines now exists to permit meaningful sampling of home gas and air.

The participating gas utilities have been asked to develop plans for gas and air sampling of a limited number of homes within their service areas.

Sampling criteria developed by EPA and CPUC concentrate on homes where contaminated condensate has been detected in or near the gas meter. Random sampling of homes receiving gas from clean lines and homes with no history of gas meter contamination will also be included as controls. The home gas and air sampling programs in California will be implemented in the next few weeks.

Gas sample results on gas distribution systems in the Eastern U.S. where PCB condensate levels were similar to or higher than levels in California have shown PCB levels only in the low microgram per cubic meter range. Indoor air sampling in homes on contaminated lines on Long Island, however, has not shown PCB levels above background levels found

homes nationwide. Testing to date has demonstrated increased exposure to PCBs from natural gas pipelines.

As a part of the remedial measures program, EPA and CPUC have also requested that each city develop and submit:

—A description of possible sources of PCBs, including equipment and past maintenance and operating practices.

—A plan for handling, marking, storing, and disposing the PCBs in accordance with the federal Toxic

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(Humboldt County)
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Substances Control Act, and applicable Department of Transportation regulations:

- A plan for abating sources of PCB contamination; and

- Information on feasible methods to remove PCBs from the distribution system.

After the home air and gas sampling portion of this program is completed, EPA, CPUC, and the utilities, will evaluate the scope and nature of the contamination problems and use the remedial measures information to develop a clean-up program for each distribution system. The program will include a timetable for removal of the PCBs and provisions for continued monitoring of the pipelines. Clean-up could take several years. Systematic removal of contaminated liquid is already underway.

A probable source of PCBs in transmission and utility distribution lines is the past use of PCB lubricating oil in turbine compressors. These compressors are located approximately 100 miles along the major transmission lines to maintain proper pressure.

Transmission and distribution companies which have never used PCBs in their compressors may also have contaminated lines from gas interchanges with contaminated systems.

Other sources of PCB contamination in utility distribution lines may include

use of PCB fluids in scrubbers used to remove dirt and other impurities from the gas pipelines and past operating and maintenance practices.

The nationwide sampling program which EPA originally developed to determine the extent of PCB contamination consisted of three phases. The program was implemented in early February as follows:

- EPA Headquarters, with the assistance of the Interstate Natural Gas Association and its member companies, implemented a cooperative sampling program to test for PCB contamination of interstate natural gas transmission systems. Condensate sampling was conducted by twenty-five interstate transmission companies covering 95 percent of the transmission mileage. Three member companies supplying gas to California participated in this part of the program.

- A similar cooperative sampling program was implemented by the EPA regional offices, with the assistance of appropriate state agencies. American Gas Association, and natural gas distribution companies to test for PCB contamination of individual utility distribution lines. In California, this part of the program was conducted by the EPA Region 9 office and the California Public Utilities Commission.

- The EPA regional offices also sampled lubricating oil used in the

pipeline compressors to ensure that companies were in compliance with the required May 1980 phase-out of PCB compressor lubricating oil. Nationwide, 246 samples were collected at 100 compressor stations. Ten samples were collected at eight California stations operated by participating utilities.

Nationwide, results of the cooperative sampling programs indicate PCB levels above 50 ppm in gas lines in New England, New York, New Jersey area, Mid-Atlantic states south to Virginia and west to Ohio, and in Chicago, and in California.

For California, the results of the three part program were as follows:

- One of the three participating transmission companies supplying gas to California detected PCBs in its system. This transmission company, working with EPA Headquarters in Washington, D.C. is now implementing a remedial program to correct the problem.

- Samples collected from compressor stations operated by utility companies did not reveal any violations of the May 1980 prohibition on the use of PCB lubricating oil in compressors. All samples were non-detectable for PCB.

- Distribution system sampling of pipeline condensate by utilities has revealed scattered PCB contamination in the San Francisco Bay area, Los Angeles, and San Diego service areas.