

**NORTH DAKOTA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION**  
**TESTING AND SAFETY DIVISION**

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Commissioners Wefald, Clark, and Cramer  
Darrell Nitschke, Director of Administration  
Alan Moch, Director, Testing & Safety Division  
PSC Legal

**FROM:** Kevin Hanson, Assistant Director, Testing & Safety Division

**DATE:** September 9, 2008

**RE:** Initial Incident Inspection Report

On September 2, 2008, Al Moch informed the Commission that he had received a report, from both Xcel Energy Gas Dispatch and Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration-Central Region, that an explosion had occurred at a duplex in Fargo, ND, on September 2, 2008. I traveled to the location of the incident on September 2 and returned on September 4.

Under 49 CFR 191.3 an incident means an event that involves a release of gas from a pipeline and:

- a death or personal injury necessitating in-patient hospitalization; or
- estimated property damage, including cost of gas lost, of the operator or others, or both, of \$50,000 or more

Under 49 CFR 191.5 the pipeline operator is to give notice of an incident by telephone to 800-424-8802 and shall include:

- Names of operator and person making the report and their telephone numbers
- The location of the incident
- The time of the incident
- The number of fatalities and personal injuries
- And all other significant facts that are known by the operator that are relevant to the cause of the incident or extent of the damages.

The location of the incident is 2215 15<sup>th</sup> Street South, Fargo, ND. The address adjacent living unit of the duplex is 2213 15<sup>th</sup> Street South. The National Response Center incident report record indicates that the incident occurred at 00:37 hours and was reported by Xcel at 03:07.

Upon arriving at the scene, I visited with Ron Jablinske, Xcel Manager of Gas Operations for Fargo. Ron indicated that Xcel had shut off power to the duplex and had erected a temporary security fence around the site. Xcel had also leak surveyed the main-line in the boulevard, the service lines and meter sets at the duplex, and the yard surrounding the duplex. Later that morning Xcel leak surveyed service risers at homes in the immediate area on 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue South, 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue South, and 16<sup>th</sup> Street South.

My interview with Abdiwahab Omar, a resident at the duplex, revealed that five individuals were in the 2215 living unit at the time of the incident. With the help of Dick Schmidt, Nilles Law Firm (representing

North Star Mutual Insurance Company, the insurer of the property) Fargo, ND, it was determined that Luul Omar, mother of Ilhan Omar and Zakarie Omar, was admitted to a burn ward in Minneapolis and was in stable condition. Ilhan and Zakarie were admitted to a local hospital for treatment and were released. Faiza Omar was admitted to a burn ward in Minneapolis and was in stable condition. Hamza Omar was admitted to a local hospital for treatment and was released. None of the individuals in the 2213 living unit were injured physically.

The 2215 living unit appears to be a total loss. Between the two living units are two single garages. The 2213 living unit didn't appear to be damaged with the exception of the wall between the two garages. No one has confirmed the property damage, but Xcel's report to the National Response Center indicates that it met the criteria for reportable incidents of \$50,000 or more estimated damage.

No one has confirmed that the incident involved a release of gas from jurisdictional facilities. Each unit of the duplex is served by a separate service line. The roof had fallen on the meter/regulator set and it appeared there was force pushing the meter set away from the house foundation about four to six inches. Also, a piece of two-by-four lumber, buried in the dirt approximately twelve inches from the riser, was exerting some force on the riser. I looked on as Xcel personnel performed preliminary testing on the service line for the 2215 living unit. Xcel excavated the service riser and pressurized the line with air to 60 psi, as measured by pressure gauge. I observed that the line pressure shown by the gauge did not remain at 60 psig but dropped off, indicating the presence of a hole in the service riser. I observed as Xcel discovered a hole at or near a plastic socket fusion connecting the riser to the service line below ground level. The soil next to the leak was grey in color, dry, and smelled strongly of natural gas odorant. The area of grey soil extended from approximately twelve to eighteen inches upstream of the leak to the house foundation. The soil adjacent to the grey colored area had much higher moisture content. At a future date, Xcel will test to determine the flow rate of the hole in the service riser.

At mid-afternoon Tuesday, Richard Pehrson of Schroeder Fire, Minneapolis, MN (investigator for Xcel), Michael Rallis of Technical Investigative Services (investigator for North Star Mutual Insurance Company, the insurer of the property), and I agreed to discontinue the investigation until a flow rate test can be performed. It was agreed that investigation should resume on or before September 15 since, under 49 CFR 191.9, the operator of a distribution pipeline system is required to submit Department of Transportation Form RSPA F 7100.1 as soon as practicable but not more than 30 days after detection of a reportable incident.

On Wednesday, September 3, I continued documenting the incident including a drawing of the site. Xcel secured the area using a six foot chain link fence with a locked gate. Xcel covered the meter set with a tarp to preserve the site. I attached red evidence tape at three locations: the trap covering the meter set, the plywood covering the hole excavated at the service riser, and to the roof that fell on the meter set. On each piece of evidence tape are the words "Public Service Commission." Before leaving Thursday I confirmed the security of the site.

While I am waiting for the field part of the investigation to resume I will be inspecting the original construction work order and any associated repair work orders for the lines serving the duplex. I will review Xcel's operations and maintenance manual. I will review Xcel call center information and response information. I will also check whether bulletins from Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration or from the National Transportation Safety Board exist concerning the pipeline materials at the incident location. I will also check the database maintained by the Plastic Pipe Database Committee of the Plastics Pipe Institute.

KJH