

SEWER LINE INSPECTION PROGRAM – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a sewer line crossbore?

A sewer line crossbore is a term used to describe an instance where a natural gas pipeline was installed using trenchless technology and penetrated a sewer line.

Are sewer line crossbores a safety hazard?

As long as the natural gas line that has penetrated a sewer line remains intact, it does not pose an immediate safety concern. However, sewer line crossbores can become a safety issue if it is disturbed or damaged. Damage could potentially occur during an attempt to clear a clogged sewer line. The sewer auger may damage the gas line causing natural gas to escape from the pipe.

What should I do if I hear or smell escaping gas?

If you smell a natural gas odor, hear the hissing sound of gas escaping, or see other signs of a leak, take the following precautions:

- Have everyone immediately evacuate the area.
- DO NOT light a match, candle or cigarette.
- DO NOT turn electrical appliances or lights on or off or use any device that may cause a spark.
- Move a safe distance away from the structure, considering the structure may be filled with natural gas and can explode outward to distances of 150 feet/50 meters or more, if there is an ignition source.
- Call **911**.
- From a safe location, call Minnesota Energy Resources at **800-889-4970**, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

What are you doing to address/resolve this issue?

Minnesota Energy Resources is launching a comprehensive inspection and communications program to locate and eliminate sewer line crossbores which includes:

- Identifying the sewer line crossbores throughout our service territory; conducting inspections; relocating as lines where crossbores are identified; and repairing the damaged sewer line.
- Altering sewer and plumbing professionals about the issue and explaining steps they should take if they are working a job involving a potential sewer line crossbore.
- Distributing information to major retailers that rent plumbing equipment so they can share the information with their customers.
- Communicating with impacted customers about the inspection process and next steps.
- Meeting with officials in cities where sewer line crossbores exist to explain the issue and next steps.

Why did you use this trenchless installation method?

The trenchless pipe installation method is used to minimize surface disruption to paving, landscaping, and hardscaping which can be caused by digging open trenches. This method is required by most franchise agreements under which Minnesota Energy Resources operates. Trenchless installation is less expensive than digging open trenches, which helps Minnesota Energy Resources contain facility installation costs that are then passed along to our customers through rates.



How could these crossbores occur without your knowing about them?

While cities actively map the location and depth of sewer mains, they generally do not map sewer lines running from private property to the sewer main line, as cities do not claim ownership of these sewer lines. In addition, sewer lines are typically made of non-conductive materials, so they are not easily detected from above ground using conventional locating equipment available to excavators.

About how many sewer crossbores exist?

We are in the process of reviewing construction records and other documented resources to determine the scope of the issue.

Once you've estimated the number of crossbores, how will you proceed?

We will begin inspections with high-priority locations, such as areas where historical crossbores have occurred. Possible crossbore locations corresponding with locations such as schools, hospitals, apartment buildings, and other structures with high density occupancy will also be given priority.

When did you become aware that this was an issue?

Past incidents in our service territory have resulted in minor property damage (usually limited to the broken/damaged sewer line). However, it was not until recently that Minnesota Energy Resources became aware of more serious incidents occurring in other parts of the country.

How many sewer crossbore incidents have there been in Minnesota Energy Resources' service territory?

Minnesota Energy Resources provides service to over 350,000 consumers through 210,000 meters in more than 165 communities in Minnesota. Our records indicate over the past 10 years, there were five reported instances where gas lines were found intersecting with sewer lines.

What is the nature of these incidents?

These incidents have primarily resulted in minor property damage to the sewer line.

If there have been approximately five claims, why didn't you start the inspections sooner?

Recently Minnesota Energy Resources became aware of more serious incidents in other parts of the country.

How will you conduct the inspections?

First, we will conduct a review of natural gas pipeline construction records. Company and sewer records will be examined to determine if trenchless installation methods were used and if the natural gas pipeline and the sewer line crossed within 10 feet. If this is the case, we will conduct a physical on-site inspection to determine the sewer line's location and to inspect the inside of the sewer line. Areas where previous crossbores have occurred will be inspected. High-priority locations such as schools, hospitals, apartment buildings, and other structures with high density will also have an inspection priority. In some instances, a video scope may be used to inspect the inside of the sewer line. If the gas pipeline is found to cross through the sewer line, the gas pipeline will be relocated and the sewer line repaired. In the event a video scope is used and cannot provide confirmation that the sewer line is clear, we may excavate the sewer line to make a final determination, and relocate the natural gas pipeline if necessary.

**How will your inspections impact customers?**

The customer may be temporarily inconvenienced if we need to access the sewer line, but it should not be for more than an hour. Impacted customers will be given advanced notice of inspections. We will need to have access to the customer's sewer line and preferably through a cleanout or vent outside the premises. If no outside access can be found, we may have to access the sewer line from inside the premises.

Who will perform the inspections?

Either Minnesota Energy Resources employees and/or Minnesota Energy Resources' contractor crews will perform the inspections. All contractor crews will be licensed and covered by existing franchise agreements, including indemnification and insurance provisions.

Why are you doing these inspections now?

Providing safe and reliable service to our customers is our top priority. We have initiated these inspections at a time when many utilities are looking at what can be done to mitigate risks by proactively addressing this issue. In addition, federal regulations have been implemented requiring natural gas utilities (local distribution companies) to create management plans for distribution pipeline integrity.

How many on-site inspections do you anticipate conducting?

We are in the process of reviewing construction records and other documented resources to determine the scope of the issue.

Who will pay for these inspections?

Minnesota Energy Resources will pay for the inspections.

How long will it take you to make all sewer crossbores safe?

This depends upon the number of inspections we will need to conduct. Presently, we are in the process of reviewing construction records and other documented resources to determine the scope of the issue.

What should customer/plumbers do if they have concerns about their natural gas service?

They should call Minnesota Energy Resources at **800-889-4970**.

What should customers/plumbers do if they smell a gas odor?

If customers/plumbers smell a natural gas odor, hear the hissing sound of natural gas escaping or see other signs of a leak, take the following precautions:

- DO NOT light a match, candle or cigarette.
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Are you going to discontinue using this horizontal or trenchless method?

We have instituted procedures to enable us to mitigate the issues associated with horizontal/trenchless digging. Our current procedures require determining the exact location of all underground lines – sewer, water, etc. -- that may be in potential crossbore with a planned trenchless construction path and depth. This is verified either by exposing the underground lines, or if these lines are deeper, digging to a depth over the lines to verify there is no potential crossbore during gas line installation.

What will Minnesota Energy Resources do to further communicate about this issue?

We plan to expand our communications to impacted customers and to plumbing/sewer cleaning professionals through mailings and through advertorials/editorials in trade newspapers. We also plan to distribute information to major retailers that rent plumbing equipment and will post information on our website at <http://www.minnesotaenergyresources.com/home/sewer.aspx> regarding this potential issue.

Will permit be needed for the inspections?

Permits may be needed, depending on the level of activity necessary to inspect and clear potential sewer line/gas line crossbores. Minnesota Energy Resources will pay the permitting fees for any field inspections/repairs that we need to complete.