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NEWS RELEASE

Leak on Kinder Morgan Products Pipeline reinforces need for Regulatory Action to Require Functional Leak Detection Systems

BELLINGHAM, Washington [Feb. 28, 2022] – Diesel fuel released from a failure of the 26-inch hazardous liquid Products Pipeline, formerly known as the Plantation Pipeline, operated by Products (SE) Pipeline Corporation, a subsidiary of Kinder Morgan Inc. was discovered on Feb. 22 discharging a currently unknown amount of diesel into a residential area in Lawrenceville, Georgia.

At this time, no known injuries have been reported, but five residences have been evacuated and their occupants relocated.

Residents of the Atlanta suburb reported smelling the odor of natural gas for several weeks. When a resident notified the local natural gas utility of unknown oil in the neighborhood, the gas utility notified the Gwinnett County Fire Department (GCFD) which then confirmed the presence of what appeared to be diesel flowing in from a nearby pipeline and reported the discharge to the operator and to the National Response Center (NRC) on Feb. 22.

“Once again weak pipeline leak detection systems are proved useless and the operator relies on a passerby’s observation to alert them to what is happening on their system,” Pipeline Safety Trust Executive Director Bill Caram said. “It’s well past time to start requiring operators to have accurate, reliable, sensitive, and robust leak detection systems on the pipelines in our neighborhoods and treasured places.”

The Products Pipeline was constructed in 1968 from steel pipeline manufactured by A.O. Smith. This make of pipeline is known to be susceptible to seam failure. According to the Pipeline Hazardous Materials and Safety Administration (PHMSA) Kinder Morgan Inc. is aware of two known anomalies at this location. The operator identified these two anomalies (dents), but deemed them “not actionable”, meaning they did not require repair.

“This troubled pipeline continues to have predictable failures,” Caram said. “We hope Kinder Morgan will take a hard look at all anomalies on this aging, failing pipeline and err on the side of safety when deciding if a potential problem is ‘actionable’ or not.”

The federal pipeline regulatory agency has issued a corrective action order to the pipeline operator, requiring new safety tests and explanations of previous tests to identify the cause of this failure. These requirements aim to change company practices that may have contributed to the failure to identify this pipe flaw before it failed.

In 2014, the same 26-inch pipeline, then known as the Plantation Pipeline, spilled an estimated 369,000 gallons of diesel in Belton, South Carolina from a failure site that started as a dent, which was repaired with a steel sleeve that then cracked and failed. The operator’s leak detection system also failed to identify that leak.

At this time, the initial cause of the Lawrenceville, Georgia leak is still unknown. Kinder Morgan Inc. has submitted a plan to re-start the 26-inch pipeline to PHMSA for approval and must have the failed section of the pipe removed and tested to help determine the cause of the failure.