



Credible.  
Independent.  
In the public interest.

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For More Information Contact:

Kenneth Clarkson  
Communications & Outreach Director  
[kenneth@pstrust.org](mailto:kenneth@pstrust.org)  
360-543-5686 x104

## NTSB Releases Investigation Report into Atmos Energy In-line Inspection Tool Incident that Killed Two and Injured Two More

BELLINGHAM, Washington [Nov. 10, 2022] – The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has released the pipeline investigation report into the June 2021 Atmos Energy pipeline incident in North Texas that claimed the lives of two workers and injured two others. The loss of life occurred during routine maintenance with an in-line inspection tool (ILI or pig). Following the incident, Atmos Energy reviewed their procedures surrounding the use of ILI tools and found there were glaring gaps it needed to address.

A crew of seven workers were removing the ILI tool when the explosion happened. The deadly blast ejected the pig from the launcher and caused the injuries and fatalities. In addition to loss of life and suffering, Atmos estimated the total property damage at their Farmersville site to be around \$580,000.

According to the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) regulations, pig loading and launching are a covered task, due to the inherent danger. In contradiction to the federal rule, Atmos did not identify the launching of ILI tools as a covered task as defined by PHMSA. Because of this, Atmos put their employees and contractors in greater danger by not mandating they be qualified under the federal regulatory definition to launch pigs.

“It is clear that Atmos’ failure to follow PHMSA regulations was a major contributor to this tragedy,” Pipeline Safety Trust Policy Counsel Erin Sutherland said. “These regulations are meant to protect operator staff from dangerous situations by ensuring they have the training and experience to safely maintain pipelines.”

To make matters worse, even though Atmos formally documented its ILI procedures in its 2019 *Pipeline Integrity Management Plan*, the configuration depicted in the procedure was not the same as the launcher associated with this tragedy, plus Atmos did not list anything about how to properly implement successful ILI inspections when using a flaring system.

A week before the explosion, during the first pig loading in the series of runs leading to this incident, workers suspected the mainline valve was leaking when their flaring system did not extinguish as anticipated. The crew continued to adjust the mainline valve's actuator until they determined a position where the leak halted or dissipated to the point where the flare finally extinguished. The team noted that position on the valve's exterior and then did not experience any issues with the flare extinguishing during the ensuing runs until the incident occurred.

In their investigation, the NTSB determined that the explosion was most likely due to the leaking mainline valve the workers had identified earlier in the week. At this point in time, the NTSB has yet to determine the exact source of the explosion's ignition, however, they specifically state that "Contributing to the explosion and its severity were Atmos Energy Corporation's procedures and training practices that did not prepare workers to recognize and safely respond to abnormal operating conditions."

"The flare tip was not a reliable way to monitor for gas leakage, and because no other system was used, the workers did not realize they were at risk," Sutherland said. "With proper training and procedures, the workers likely would have noticed the mainline valve was still leaking and causing dangerous pressure to build behind the pig."

Since the catastrophe, Atmos determined the need to establish a new covered task for pigging procedures; Atmos workers and contractors performing in-line inspection operations must now be qualified as required by minimum federal safety standards.

###

**About Pipeline Safety Trust:** The Pipeline Safety Trust is a nonprofit public watchdog promoting pipeline safety through education and advocacy by increasing access to information, and by building partnerships with residents, safety advocates, government and industry, that result in safer communities and a healthier environment.