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## CenterPoint Energy's Apology Not Enough, More Must be Done to Protect Our Communities from Pipeline Incidents

This Past Christmas Eve, CenterPoint Energy Improperly Mixed Amounts of Propane into their Gas System Which Led to Hundreds of Carbon Monoxide Emergency Calls and Sent Multiple People to the Hospital in Indiana

BELLINGHAM, Washington [Feb. 8, 2023] – On Dec. 24, 2022, at least four people from the areas of Clarksville, Jeffersonville, and New Albany, Ind. were sent to the hospital following the accumulation of carbon monoxide in residences and businesses. Hundreds of households reported the carbon monoxide presence to Indiana emergency management authorities. A month and a half later, CenterPoint Energy has finally admitted responsibility for the buildup of carbon monoxide. The admittance comes following an operational review of their propane air facility located in southeast Indiana. On Feb. 7, 2023, the energy giant issued an apology to residents which sited “safety as their top priority,” despite originally claiming they were not culpable for the leaks.

Immediately after the 2022 Christmas Eve incident, CenterPoint Energy denied any problems with their natural gas system. The company has since backtracked their previous statement and admitted to wrongdoing and improper operation. CenterPoint said they needed to acquire the assistance of a third-party investigator to determine they were at fault. The operator has said their investigation uncovered an incorrect mixture of gas at their facility, which caused too much propane to be added into their pipeline system leading to the production of carbon monoxide. If the proper mixture of air and propane is not blended into the natural gas system, home appliances will not fully combust the propane thus producing carbon monoxide.

“Trust is an essential part of public safety and CenterPoint’s customers count on them to deliver a safe product into their homes,” Pipeline Safety Trust Executive Director Bill Caram

said. "CenterPoint now has some work to do, much more than just an apology, to gain the trust of its customers."

According to a report by Kentucky-based reporter Molly Jett, Indianans impacted by the carbon monoxide incident are upset with the extreme lack of transparency by CenterPoint.

One resident pointed out the company is lucky no one died as a result of the carbon monoxide accumulation. The affected homeowner went on to say that it was unbelievable the company originally denied any wrongdoing in the episode.

Pipeline Safety Trust (PST) emphasizes the fact that CenterPoint has not reported this event as an incident to the federal pipeline safety regulator, U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), even though the 30-day deadline to report incidents has passed. It is plausible CenterPoint could argue that even with four hospitalizations, they wouldn't need to report to PHMSA because the incident did not involve "a release of gas from a pipeline." Further, pipeline operators are not required to disclose to regulators other products, such as propane, blended into the natural gas system as they only need to report the predominant product.

"This event by a gas pipeline operator appears to have fallen into a strange regulatory grey area," Caram said. "Many people were sickened, some hospitalized, seemingly due to a failure by the pipeline operator, yet it may not qualify as a reportable pipeline incident. Meanwhile, operators can continue blending in propane mixtures without reporting its presence to customers or even regulators. This is not in the public interest."

Along with their apology on Feb. 7, 2023, CenterPoint noted they have shut down their Jeffersonville propane air facility until the end of the year to prevent a "recurrence." However, the company also points out they see no further indication that the incorrect propane mixture is still in their system.

The state regulator, the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission (IURC), is aware of the incident and CenterPoint said they have been involved in the investigation. CenterPoint states the company will be wholly on board with any directives and guidance given by the IURC moving forward.

"We hope to see strong regulatory action from the IURC to uphold the trust the public places in their power to keep them safe," Caram said.

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**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.