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Recently Signed Oregon Law Requires Public Notice to PUC and Customers When Blending More Than 2.5% Hydrogen into the Natural Gas Distribution System

With no current federal regulations requiring operators supplying natural gas to homes and businesses to notify either customers or federal regulators when blending hydrogen into their systems, Oregon Senate Bill 685 is a step in the right direction, but the state must go further to protect the public from blended hydrogen's unique threats.

Bellingham, WASHINGTON - [June 18, 2025] – When it comes to hydrogen blending, state and federal regulations are inadequate and outdated, as only a few states require some form of notice to their state regulator when adding hydrogen to a natural gas distribution system. These aging regulatory frameworks were developed decades before hydrogen blending became a consideration and are desperately in need of modernization to address safety concerns. With this new legislation, the state of Oregon is showing that public notice around hydrogen blending in distribution systems is not only possible, but crucial for public transparency around the safety of our pipeline systems.

Oregon passed the bill in response to the lack of transparency and public concern around NW Natural blending hydrogen into its distribution system in Portland without prior notice or approval. The bill aims to increase transparency around hydrogen blending into natural gas distribution systems throughout the entire state. The bill requires operators to inform customers of their plan at least 60 days prior to blending more than 2.5% hydrogen into their system. It also requires operators to file a notice with the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) outlining their reason for increasing hydrogen blending beyond 2.5%, information about any permitting or siting approvals, a description of public outreach done by the operator, and any other information requested by the commission.

“We were encouraged to see Senator Pham take up this important issue and close this regulatory gap. Oregon has taken the first step in showing the rest of the country that we must increase public transparency around hydrogen’s potentially dangerous properties,” Pipeline Safety Trust State Policy Advisor Amanda McKay said.

Very different from methane, the primary component of natural gas, hydrogen poses unique and increased risks when blended into pipelines. Hydrogen is a much smaller molecule than methane and can have a higher propensity to leak out of pipelines. When leaked, hydrogen is more likely to explode than methane, with a flammability range of 4-75% as compared to 5-15% with methane. Hydrogen explosions also burn hotter and are harder to see, due to the clear nature of hydrogen flames in daylight. Additionally, many gas distribution systems in the U.S. were not designed to move hydrogen, making the pipes susceptible to embrittlement and cracking, and increasing the potential risk of leaks and ruptures.

Earlier versions of the bill sought to further address hydrogen’s unique threats by including requirements for operators to submit an application to and gain approval from the PUC before blending any amount of hydrogen into a distribution system. This would have allowed the PUC to conduct an analysis of the blending’s impact on utility infrastructure, including risks of leakage and corrosion, and the potential integrity issues of blending on in-home piping. These earlier drafts also included more detailed notice requirements, such as providing maps to local governing bodies, health authorities, and fire authorities about where blending is happening. Industry groups opposing the bill argued that these commonsense requirements were unnecessary and burdensome.

“While we commend the sponsors’ commitment to increased public transparency, seeing the pushback the bill received from industry is concerning,” McKay said. “Tragedies can occur when an industry relies on keeping its customers in the dark about safety.”

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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.