

Potential Sewer/Natural Gas Line Conflicts - Frequently Asked Questions

Overview

On Feb. 1, 2010, a sewer cleaning contractor was injured, and a home at 2014 Villard Ave., in St. Paul, Minn., was destroyed from a natural gas-fueled fire stemming from a natural gas leak caused by the contractor's perforation of a natural gas main that intersected the sewer line. We take this issue very seriously. We will continue to cooperate with the investigation and work with the Minnesota Office of Pipeline Safety and Minnesota Department of Public Safety to address concerns.

What actions is Xcel Energy taking?

Safety is a core value at Xcel Energy and it is our priority to maintain a safe and reliable natural gas distribution system. As a result, we have initiated the following comprehensive three-part plan:

1. We are checking sewer lines in the area immediately surrounding the Villard Ave. (started Feb. 6, 2010).
2. We are defining additional areas on our system that need checking in an effort to locate other conflicts with sewer lines that may exist.
3. We are expanding our communications to customers and plumbing/sewer cleaning professionals, to work with us to ensure safety.

Are sewer/natural gas line conflicts a safety hazard?

As long as a natural gas line intersecting a sewer line is not penetrated, it poses no safety hazard. However, power equipment used to unclog sewer pipes can penetrate the natural gas main if the clog is located in the vicinity of the natural gas main (typically in the boulevard or under the sidewalk).

How common is this issue?

We believe sewer/natural gas line conflicts in our service area are rare. Our gas lines are generally located on just one side of the street, and normally located well above sewer lines. However, in cases where our gas lines have been moved from their original location (for example, due to road expansions or sewer separation projects) it is possible that our lines inadvertently intersected some sewer lines. This is because sewer lines installed before 2005 are generally not "locatable" because they are made of clay, contain no tracer wire, and cannot otherwise be identified above ground. Sewer line conflicts are a national issue, and not unique to Xcel Energy, the City of St. Paul, or the state of Minnesota.

Why wouldn't Xcel Energy have known the gas line intersected the sewer line?

We use a technique called "directional boring" that allows us to install gas mains under paved surfaces such as streets and driveways, and also under large, mature trees to minimize damage. This approach allows us to install gas lines with significantly less disruption than open trenching, but also means we would not see any sewer lines that are above the depth typically expected. Nearly all projects use a combination of directional boring and open trenching.

What should I do if I have a sewer clog?

If a customer is planning to have their sewer line cleaned, they should call Xcel Energy's dedicated 24-hour Gas Emergency/Dispatch number at 1-800-895-2999. We will confirm

whether an inspection is needed and will take appropriate action. Inspections of sewer lines involve putting a camera through the line to inspect it for conflicts. Xcel Energy provides sewer line inspections at no cost.

How do I know if a contractor is doing work for Xcel Energy?

If you have questions regarding anyone who indicates they are working for Xcel Energy, please call our dedicated 24-hour Gas Emergency/Dispatch number at 1-800-895-2999.

What will Xcel Energy do to further communicate about this issue?

We are expanding our communications to customers and plumbing/sewer cleaning professionals through mailings, advertisements in newspapers and postings on our website at www.xcelenergy.com regarding this potential issue. Customers who have concerns about their natural gas service can call our dedicated 24-hour Gas Emergency/Dispatch number at 1-800-895-2999.