

## Natural gas construction, maintenance, and inspection information for community officials and emergency responders

# Venting of pipelines during gas construction projects

### What is natural gas flaring? What is a blowdown?

For various reasons, whether related to construction, maintenance, or inspection of a pipeline, sometimes natural gas needs to be safely removed from a pipeline. Many times the gas can be diverted. However, in cases when that is not possible, there are two primary techniques to remove the gas from the pipeline.

#### Flaring

Flaring ignites and burns off the natural gas released from a pipeline in a controlled manner. Flaring reduces the amount of methane, (the primary component of natural gas), released into the atmosphere, as well as burns the mercaptan odorant in the gas to reduce the smell of natural gas in the air. A flare system consists of a flare stack and piping that feeds gas to the stack. There are variable sizes of the flares but they typically produce a flame between 10 and 40 feet in height. Flaring operations are a safe and standard industry practice. Most companies, including Xcel Energy, make every attempt to perform them away from the public.

#### Blowdown

A blowdown is when natural gas is released directly to the atmosphere. Xcel Energy works to reduce the environmental impact of releasing natural gas into the atmosphere but there are times when it is the only option. A “roaring” noise is associated with blowdowns and people in the area may detect the mercaptan odorant which is added to natural gas for normal detection purposes.

### Xcel Energy’s commitment to the Methane Challenge

As a member of the EPA’s Natural Gas Star program since 2008, Xcel Energy has deployed strategies to responsibly reduce methane emissions from its natural gas operations. By joining the EPA’s Methane Challenge, Xcel Energy plans to enhance these efforts, applying the same commitment to reducing methane that it has used to achieve nationally recognized emission reductions from its electric operations.

Xcel Energy plans to initially focus on one of the largest emission sources of the natural gas system—the venting of pipelines during construction projects.

<https://www.epa.gov/natural-gas-star-program/natural-gas-star-program>

<https://www.epa.gov/natural-gas-star-program/natural-gas-star-methane-challenge-program>

#### Public outreach and notifications

The venting of pipelines is highly noticeable in the areas where they occur because of the noise, the visibility of the flame in a flaring situation and the potential scent of mercaptan odor present during blowdown operations. Xcel Energy works to notify public officials, emergency responders, and people in the area when possible in these situations, depending on the location, timing, and other variables. Outreach can include but is not limited to notifying public officials and emergency responders, a recorded outbound call from Xcel Energy to customers in the area, and traffic signs.

