

**PENNSYLVANIA
PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION
Harrisburg, PA 17120**

**Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission,
Bureau of Investigation and Enforcement**

**Public Meeting held February 20, 2025
3038111-OSA
Docket No. M-2024-3038111**

v.

Columbia Gas of Pennsylvania, Inc.

STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER KATHRYN L. ZERFUSS

Before the Commission today is a proposed Joint Petition for Approval of Settlement filed by the Commission's Bureau of Investigation and Enforcement (I&E) and Columbia Gas of Pennsylvania, Inc. (Columbia Gas) with respect to an informal investigation conducted by I&E.

During an investigation, I&E engineers found evidence of a weld burn-through on one of the welds on a pipe at a Columbia Gas regulator station located in Rochester, Beaver County. A weld burn-through occurs when excessive heat during the welding process creates an open hole. While various techniques or protocols can be used to repair these kinds of holes, it's important to test gas pipelines for leaks after such repairs to ensure the pipe's structural integrity has not been compromised.

A contractor employed by Columbia Gas had created the burn-through and then seemingly attempted to repair it all while the pipeline was in service. The regulator station and the pipe in question remained in service for approximately four months before this issue was discovered, at which point, the regulator station and associated pipe were taken out of service so the proper repairs could be completed.

Columbia Gas' Welding Manual outlines procedures for performing in-service welds; however, at the time of this incident, the manual did not specify whether repairing a burn-through could be or should be done while the pipeline is in-service.

As part of this Settlement, the parties have agreed to Columbia Gas paying a \$9,000 Civil Penalty and implementing remedial actions, including, but not limited to: reviewing and revising its current Quality Assurance/Quality Control practice for welds completed by third parties; conduct a casual analysis whenever a pipeline burn-through occurs on an in-service pipeline; and updating its Welding Manual and related training materials to refine in-service welding procedures.

Thankfully, no one was injured, and no property was damaged in this incident, though such outcomes are entirely possible. In the recent past, several significant natural gas explosions

have taken place, resulting in tragic loss of life, severe injuries, property damage, and likely financial or economic setbacks for affected communities. These recent serious incidents serve as a vital reminder of the need for strict safety precautions when working with natural gas pipelines.

The safety of Pennsylvanians is paramount. The Commission is charged with investigating incidents and possible violations and ensuring that penalties are strong enough to hold responsible parties accountable. I do not believe that the \$9,000 penalty in this matter meets the severity of this incident and is woefully inadequate given the circumstances. In spite of my concerns about the dollar amount of the penalty, I will be voting to approve this settlement, because it is important to memorialize the remedial actions contained therein.

DATE: February 20, 2025



Kathryn L. Zarfuss, Commissioner