

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

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

**Public Meeting held December 18, 2025  
3052089-OSA  
Docket No. M-2025-3052089**

v.

**Peoples Natural Gas Company LLC**

**STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN STEPHEN M. DeFRANK**

Before the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (Commission) is the Joint Petition for Approval of Settlement (Settlement) filed on July 24, 2025 by the Commission's Bureau of Investigation and Enforcement (I&E) and Peoples Natural Gas Company LLC (Peoples). The proposed Settlement resolves an informal investigation initiated by I&E in relation to an incident that occurred on July 28, 2022, when a contractor of Peoples was performing excavation in Johnstown, Pennsylvania and struck an appurtenance on a transmission pipeline with a mechanical excavator. The incident occurred in the tolerance zone, which is an area within 18-inches of a facility. A Peoples' construction inspector was on site and hit by blowing debris. The construction inspector was taken for medical evaluation and was released without being admitted. Natural gas escaped and a fire ensued. The mechanical excavator was left in place, remaining in operation, and was engulfed in flames. Over 300 customers lost natural gas service for approximately thirty hours.

Had this matter been litigated, I&E would have alleged that: (1) Peoples' procedures failed to specify how to safely perform excavation work in the tolerance zone; (2) Peoples failed to adequately keep maps or records of the location of the damaged appurtenance; (3) Peoples failed to keep complete maps, plans, and records for the damaged appurtenance; and (4) Peoples failed to notify the Commission of a major construction project.

In the Settlement, I&E and Peoples agreed to resolve the investigation for Peoples' payment of a \$25,000 civil penalty and implementation of a number of corrective measures focused on the establishment of procedures, training, tracking, and recordkeeping designed to enhance safe excavation techniques.

I am voting in support of modifying the Settlement by increasing the agreed-upon civil penalty. Particularly troubling to me is the allegation that the maps provided to

Peoples' line locator did not accurately depict the location of the appurtenance that was damaged.

This is not the first instance where Peoples has experienced a problem locating its facilities during excavation activities. In 2010, the Commission approved a Settlement, as modified by an increased civil penalty, where one of the allegations related to the failure of a contract locator to accurately locate the pipeline.<sup>1</sup> In that matter, the Commission directed Peoples to update its distribution system maps.<sup>2</sup> Over fifteen years have passed since the Commission issued this directive and mapping issues remain. The increased civil penalty in the matter before the Commission today appropriately reflects the seriousness of the incident and the repeat offense.

To me, it is troubling when utilities do not know the location of their facilities, especially facilities that transport natural gas. In the Settlement that is before the Commission, Peoples agrees to continue to develop and improve its geographic information system and record keeping so that field personnel have access to maps. This commitment is encouraging and necessary. Luck played a factor in the 2022 incident in Johnstown and it is fortunate that no one was seriously injured. However, luck cannot be relied on in lieu of tools, like accurate facility mapping, to prevent excavation damage.

**Date: December 18, 2025**

  
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**Stephen M. DeFrank**

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<sup>1</sup> *Pa. Pub. Util. Comm'n v. The Peoples Natural Gas Company, d/b/a, Dominion Peoples*, Docket No. M-2009-2086651 (Opinion and Order entered May 11, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at Ordering Paragraph no. 5.