

each natural gas distribution system operator with Century pipe revise their plastic pipe repair procedure(s) to exclude pipe pinching for isolating sections of Century pipe. Additionally, RSPA recommends replacement of any Century pipe segment that has a significant leak history or which for any reason is of suspect integrity.

**Authority:** 49 U.S.C. Chapter 601; 49 CFR 1.53.

Issued in Washington, DC on March 5, 1999.

**Richard B. Felder,**

*Associate Administrator for Pipeline Safety.*  
[FR Doc. 99-6013 Filed 3-10-99; 8:45 am]

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## DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

### Research and Special Programs Administration

#### Potential Failures Due to Brittle-Like Cracking of Older Plastic Pipe in Natural Gas Distribution Systems

**AGENCY:** Research and Special Programs Administration (RSPA), DOT.

**ACTION:** Notice; issuance of advisory bulletin on brittle-like failures of plastic pipe to owners and operators of natural gas distribution systems.

**SUMMARY:** RSPA is issuing this advisory bulletin to owners and operators of natural gas distribution systems to inform them of the potential vulnerability of older plastic gas distribution pipe to brittle-like cracking. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) recently issued a Special Investigation Report (NTSB/SIR-98/01), *Brittle-like Cracking in Plastic Pipe for Gas Service*, that described how plastic pipe installed in natural gas distribution systems from the 1960s through the early 1980s may be vulnerable to brittle-like cracking resulting in gas leakage and potential hazards to the public and property. RSPA has also issued an additional advisory bulletin (ADB-99-01) reminding natural gas distribution system operators of the potential poor resistance to brittle-like cracking of certain polyethylene pipe manufactured by Century Utility Products, Inc.

**ADDRESSES:** This document can be viewed on the Office of Pipeline Safety (OPS) home page at: <http://ops.dot.gov>.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Gopala K. Vinjamuri, (202) 366-4503, or by email at [gopala.vinjamuri@rspa.dot.gov](mailto:gopala.vinjamuri@rspa.dot.gov).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

### I. Background

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) recently issued a Special Investigation Report (NTSB/SIR-98/01), *Brittle-like Cracking in Plastic Pipe for Gas Service*, that described how plastic pipe installed in natural gas distribution systems from the 1960s through the early 1980s may be vulnerable to brittle-like cracking resulting in gas leakage and potential hazards to the public and property. An NTSB survey of the accident history of plastic pipe suggested that the material may be susceptible to premature brittle-like cracking under conditions of local stress intensification because of improper joining or installation procedures. Hundreds of thousands of miles of plastic pipe have been installed, with a significant amount installed prior to the mid-1980s. NTSB believes any vulnerability of this material to premature failure could represent a potentially serious hazard to public safety.

The NTSB report addressed the following safety issues:

- The vulnerability of plastic pipe to premature failures due to brittle-like cracking;
- The adequacy of available guidance relating to the installation and protection of plastic pipe connections to steel mains; and
- Performance monitoring of plastic pipeline systems as a way of detecting unacceptable performance in piping systems.

Copies of this report may be obtained by calling NTSB's Public Inquiry Office at 202-314-6551.

The phenomenon of brittle-like cracking in plastic pipe as described in the NTSB report and generally understood within the plastic pipeline industry relates to a part-through crack initiation in the pipe wall followed by stable crack growth at stress levels much lower than the stress required for yielding, resulting in a very tight slit-like opening and gas leak. Although significant cracking may occur at points of stress concentration and near improperly designed or installed fittings, small brittle-like cracks may be difficult to detect until a significant amount of gas leaks out of the pipe, and potentially migrates into an enclosed space such as a basement. Premature brittle-like cracking requires relatively high localized stress intensification that may be a result from geometrical discontinuities, excessive bending, improper fitting assemblies, and/or dents and gouges. Because this failure mode exhibits no evidence of gross yielding at the failure location, the term

brittle-like cracking is used. This phenomenon is different from brittle fracture, in which the failure results in fragmentation of the pipe.

The report suggests that the combination of more durable plastic pipe materials and more realistic strength testing has improved the reliability of estimates of the long-term hydrostatic strength of modern plastic pipe and fittings. The report also documents that older polyethylene pipe, manufactured from the 1960s through the early 1980s, may fail at lower stresses and after less time than was originally projected. NTSB alleges that past standards used to rate the long-term strength of plastic pipe may have overrated the strength and resistance to brittle-like cracking of much of the plastic pipe manufactured and used for gas service from the 1960s through the early 1980s.

In 1998, NTSB made several recommendations to trade organizations and to the Research and Special Programs Administration (RSPA) on the need for a better understanding of the susceptibility of plastic pipe to brittle-like cracking. NTSB recommended that RSPA "[d]etermine the extent of the susceptibility to premature brittle-like cracking of older plastic piping (beyond that marketed by Century Utilities Products Inc.) that remains in use for gas service nationwide."

### II. Advisory Bulletin (ADB-99-02)

**To:** Owners and Operators of and Natural Gas Distribution Pipeline Systems

**Subject:** Potential susceptibility of plastic pipe installed between the 1960 and the early 1980s to premature failure due to brittle-like cracking.

**Purpose:** To inform natural gas distribution pipeline operators of the need to determine the extent of susceptibility to brittle-like cracking of plastic pipe installed between the years 1960 and early 1980s.

**Advisory:** A review of Office of Pipeline Safety (OPS) reportable natural gas pipeline incidents and the findings of NTSB Special Investigation Report (NTSB/SIR-98/01) indicates that certain plastic pipe used in natural gas distribution service may be susceptible to brittle-like cracking. The standards used to rate the long-term strength of plastic pipe may have overrated the strength and resistance to brittle-like cracking of much of the plastic pipe manufactured and used for gas service from the 1960s through the early 1980s.

It is recommended that all owners and operators of natural gas distribution systems identify all pre-1982 plastic pipe installations, analyze leak

histories, and evaluate any conditions that may impose high stresses on the pipe. Appropriate remedial action, including replacement, should be taken to mitigate any risks to public safety.

**Authority:** 49 U.S.C. Chapter 601; 49 CFR 1.53.

Issued in Washington, D.C. on March 3, 1999.

**Richard B. Felder,**

*Associate Administrator for Pipeline Safety.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

### Surface Transportation Board

[STB Docket No. AB-437 (Sub-No. 1)]

#### **Kansas Southwestern Railway, L.L.C.—Abandonment—In Sumner, Harper, Barber, Reno and Kingman Counties, KS**

On February 19, 1999, the Kansas Southwestern Railway, L.L.C. (KSW) filed with the Surface Transportation Board (Board) an application to abandon: (1) a line of railroad known as the Hardtner Branch, extending from milepost 514, at Conway Springs, to milepost 571.85, at Kiowa; and (2) a portion of a line of railroad known as the Stafford Branch, extending from milepost 559.028, at Conway Springs, to milepost 610.0, at Olcott, at total distance of 108.8 miles, in Sumner, Harper, Barber, Reno, and Kingman Counties, KS. The line includes no stations and traverses U.S. Postal Service ZIP Codes 67031, 67106, 67118, 67014, 67622, 67068, 67121, 67004, 67049, 67003, 67061, and 67070.

The line does not contain federally granted rights-of-way. Any documentation in the KSW's possession will be made available promptly to those requesting it. The applicant's entire case for abandonment (case-in-chief) was filed with the application.

This line of railroad has appeared on the applicant's system diagram map or has been included in its narrative in category 1 since August 20, 1998.

The interest of railroad employees will be protected by the conditions set forth in *Oregon Short Line R. Co.—Abandonment—Goshen*, 360 I.C.C. 91 (1979).

Any interested person may file with the Board written comments concerning the proposed abandonment or protests (including the protestant's entire opposition case) by April 5, 1999. All interested persons should be aware that, following any abandonment of rail service and salvage of the line, the line

may be suitable for other public use, including interim trail use. Any request for a public use condition under 49 U.S.C. 10905 (49 CFR 1152.28) or for a trail use condition under 16 U.S.C. 1247(d) (49 CFR 1152.29) must be filed by April 5, 1999. Each trail use request must be accompanied by a \$150 filing fee. See 49 CFR 1002.2(f)(27).

Applicant's reply to any opposition statements and its response to trail use requests must be filed by April 20, 1999. See 49 CFR 1152.26(a).

Persons opposing the proposed abandonment that wish to participate actively and fully in the process should file a protest. Persons who may oppose the abandonment but who do not wish to participate fully in the process by appearing at any oral hearings or by submitting verified statements of witnesses containing detailed evidence should file comments. Persons seeking information concerning the filing of protests should refer to 49 CFR 1152.25. Persons interested only in seeking public use or trail use conditions should also file comments.

In addition, a commenting party or protestant may provide:

- (i) An offer of financial assistance (OFA) for continued rail service under 49 U.S.C. 10904 (due 120 days after the application is filed or 10 days after the application is granted by the Board, whichever occurs sooner);
- (ii) Recommended provisions for protection of the interests of employees;
- (iii) A request for a public use condition under 49 U.S.C. 10905; and
- (iv) A statement pertaining to prospective use of the right-of-way for interim trail use and rail banking under 16 U.S.C. 1247(d) and 49 CFR 1152.29.

All filings in response to this notice must indicate the proceeding designation STB Docket No. AB-437 (Sub-No. 1) and must be sent to: (1) Surface Transportation Board, Office of the Secretary, Case Control Unit, 1925 K Street, N.W. Washington, DC 20423-0001; and (2) Karl Morell, Ball Janik LLP, Suite 225, 1455 F Street N.W., Washington, DC 20005. The original and 10 copies of all comments or protests shall be filed with the Board with a certificate of service. Except as otherwise set forth in part 1152, every document filed with the Board must be served on all parties to the abandonment proceeding. 49 CFR 1104.12(a).

The lines sought to be abandoned will be available for subsidy or sale for continued rail use, if the Board decides to permit the abandonment in accordance with applicable laws and regulations (49 U.S.C. 10904 and 49 CFR 1152.27). Each OFA must be

accompanied by a \$1,000 filing fee. See 49 CFR 1002.2(f)(25). No subsidy arrangement approved under 49 U.S.C. 10904 shall remain in effect for more than 1 year unless otherwise mutually agreed by the parties (49 U.S.C. 10904(f)(4)(B)). Applicant will promptly provide upon request to each interested party an estimate of the subsidy and minimum purchase price required to keep the line in operation. The carrier's representative to whom inquiries may be made concerning sale or subsidy terms is set forth above.

Persons seeking further information concerning abandonment procedures may contact the Board's Office of Public Services at (202) 565-1592 or refer to the full abandonment regulations at 49 CFR part 1152. Questions concerning environmental issues may be directed to the Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) at (202) 565-1545. [TDD for the hearing impaired is available at (202) 565-1695.]

An environmental assessment (EA) (or environmental impact statement (EIS), if necessary) prepared by SEA will be served upon all parties of record and upon any agencies or other persons who commented during its preparation. Other interested persons may contact SEA to obtain a copy of the EA (or EIS). EAs in abandonment proceedings normally will be made available within 33 days of the filing of the application. The deadline for submission of comments on the EA will generally be within 30 days of its service. The comments received will be addressed in the Board's decision. A supplemental EA or EIS may be issued where appropriate.

Board decisions and notices are available on our website at "WWW.STB.DOT.GOV."

Decided: March 3, 1999.

By the Board, David M. Konschnik, Director, Office of Proceedings.

**Vernon A. Williams,**  
*Secretary.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

### Submission for OMB review; comment request

#### Agency Information Collection Activities

March 4, 1999

The Department of Treasury has submitted the following public information collection requirement(s) to OMB for review and clearance under the