

Landslide caused West Virginia pipeline explosion, TransCanada reports

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By Anya Litvak / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Columbia Gas Transmission has told federal pipeline regulators that a landslide was the apparent cause of the rupture and explosion of a new natural gas pipeline in Marshall County, W.Va., last month.

The site of the break was at the bottom of a steep hill on Nixon Ridge, just south of Moundsville.

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration incident report, provided to the Post-Gazette by environmental activist organization Climate Investigations Center, indicates that officials inside Columbia's control room got an alert about low pressure on the line at 4:16 a.m. on June 7 and sent someone to investigate. Marshall County 911 reported getting calls just a few minutes later reporting an explosion. At 4:37 a.m., the emergency agency called Columbia to report the news.

The carbon steel pipe, manufactured by Durabond in 2015, was not operating above its maximum pressure at the time of the incident. When it burst, it spewed \$437,250 worth of natural gas. No one was injured.

TransCanada, which owns the Columbia Gas Transmission system, has been working on repairing the pipeline, pushing back the expected in-service date from early July to the middle of the month.

"The weather in the region has continued to create challenging conditions during the remediation process," the company said on a website it uses to communicate with customers.

Lindsey Fought, a spokesperson with TransCanada, said the company is continuing to cooperate with federal authorities in the investigation.

She confirmed that the federal pipeline agency and TransCanada's "internal findings point to land subsidence as the cause of the rupture."

It may take months or years for federal regulators to complete their investigation of the Marshall County incident. When a natural gas liquids pipeline burst into flames in Follansbee, W.Va., in 2015, it took PHMSA more than a year to close the case, declaring that the root cause was subsidence.

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A final report for the Spectra Energy pipeline that ruptured in Salem Township, Westmoreland County in 2016 is still not posted on the federal site.

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