

# Energy issues

energy + time

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March-April 2007

## An Important Note About Natural Gas Safety

Nothing is more important to us than providing safe and reliable natural gas service to you. We continually monitor and inspect our pipeline system and respond 24/7 to natural gas emergencies. We regularly provide information to you through our newsletters, [www.washingtongas.com](http://www.washingtongas.com), the media, and various community efforts to keep you informed about gas safety and what to do in an emergency. Please take time to review this month's information and share it with family and friends. ☺

## Pipeline Safety

Washington Gas responds to natural gas emergencies around the clock and performs physical checks on various parts of its transmission and distribution pipeline system at regularly scheduled intervals. The Washington Gas system is part of a vast nationwide network of mostly underground pipelines that deliver natural gas to millions of customers. Washington Gas complies with all federal and state safety regulations for natural gas companies, and follows strict design, construction, testing, inspection, operations and maintenance codes — up to and including the natural gas meter in most cases.

Washington Gas operates a relatively small segment of **transmission** pipeline — approximately 200 miles — and thousands of miles of **distribution** pipelines. The company's transmission lines typically carry natural gas at higher pressures from our gate stations, where gas enters our pipeline system, to our regulator stations, where the pressure is reduced for distribution to homes and businesses. Pipeline markers (similar to the illustration on the right) indicate the presence, but not the exact location or depth, of transmission pipelines in underground rights-of-way. Markers identify what's flowing through the pipeline, such as oil or gas; the name of the pipeline operator; and phone numbers to call in an emergency or before digging or excavating. Less than half of the company's transmission lines are in high consequence areas, locations specifically defined in regulations as areas where pipeline leaks could have greater consequences to health, safety and the environment. Go to [www.washingtongas.com](http://www.washingtongas.com), highlight *Corporate* at the home page and click on *Gas Transmission Pipeline Integrity Management Program* for more information. For transmission pipeline operators in your area, visit the National Pipeline Mapping System at [www.npms.phmsa.dot.gov](http://www.npms.phmsa.dot.gov).

**Distribution** pipelines deliver natural gas directly to consumers' homes and businesses and can cause serious injury if they are damaged. Although the majority of buried distribution pipelines are generally not marked above ground, you can help prevent damage to them. See *Call Before You Dig*. ☺

### Frederick County, Maryland, customers:

Call your local Frederick office at 301-662-2151 for information about natural gas leaks, emergencies, other safety concerns, energy assistance, and customer services. ☺

## Call Before You Dig

Spring can mean lots of great outdoor projects that include digging, landscaping, building an addition or deck, or other types of home improvements. No matter how large or small the project is, underground utility lines must be located before beginning any kind of work that involves moving earth and altering the ground's surface. Maryland homeowners and businesses are required to notify **Miss Utility** at **1-800-257-7777** to coordinate the location and marking of the underground utilities. The service is free, and high visibility safety paint and/or flags will be used to mark buried utility lines on the property. The markings will help you avoid damages to underground utilities, which can cause serious injury, significant expense and service outages.

Allow **at least two full business days' notice** (excluding weekends and holidays) prior to the scheduled start of a project, and please don't begin until all lines have been marked.

If there is no evidence of markings, check back with **Miss Utility** to ensure there are no underground utilities where you plan to dig. ☺



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BEFORE DIGGING  
CALL  
WASHINGTON GAS  
TOLL FREE  
1-800-752-7520  
OR  
1-703-750-1000

BEFORE YOU DIG  
CALL MISS UTILITY  
IN VA  
1-800-552-7001  
IN MD/DC  
1-800-257-7777

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## 811 coming soon!

811 is the new federally-designated "call before you dig" phone number that should be available nationwide later this spring. This new easy-to-remember number will connect you with your local **Miss Utility** center as described above. Visit [www.call811.com](http://www.call811.com) for more information. ☺

## What To Do If You Smell Natural Gas

**RECOGNIZE:** Natural gas is non-toxic, colorless, odorless and combustibles. For detection and safety, natural gas delivered through Washington Gas's distribution system has been odorized with an unpleasant odorant known as mercaptan. (Gas traveling through a very small portion of our transmission pipeline is not odorized, and information about visible signs of a possible leak are provided below.) Call **202-624-6467** for a free odorant sample brochure. Government, schools, businesses, churches, property managers and others are welcome to request multiple copies for public education and awareness purposes.

**If at any time you are concerned about your safety, call 911.**

**REACT:** If you smell natural gas, call the **Washington Gas Emergency Leak Line** at **703-750-1400** or **800-752-7520** outside the local calling area. Frederick County customers call **301-662-2151**. *Do not attempt to locate the source of the odor.*

If the odor is very strong or you hear a blowing or hissing noise, vacate the building or area immediately, leaving doors unlocked as you go. Do nothing that could create an ignition source — do not light a match or use any type of phone or battery-powered equipment. Do not turn electrical equipment or light switches on or off, or start your car. Call **911** and the appropriate Washington Gas emergency numbers as noted above *only* after you have reached a safe distance away from the building or area.

Follow the same precautions if you are outside and smell gas; hear hissing, blowing, or roaring noises; or see any of the following: dirt being thrown into the air; fire coming from the ground or appearing to burn above the ground; water bubbling or being blown into the air at a pond, creek or river; or if you see a dry spot in a moist field or dead or dying vegetation on or near a pipeline right-of-way.

**Natural gas is distributed through a network of underground pipes and service lines. If a leak should occur, it is possible for gas to migrate into buildings, including those without natural gas service.**

**RESPOND:** Washington Gas dispatches trained technicians to the scene of a natural gas leak any time of day or night. If a leak poses an immediate threat, quick action is taken to make the area safe. If it does not pose an immediate threat, corrective action is scheduled for a later date. This prioritization process helps to ensure the safety of customers while allocating resources efficiently, coordinating with customers' schedules, and minimizing traffic disruptions. ☉

## Gas Theft is Dangerous

**T**ampering with a gas meter is illegal *and* dangerous. Call our **Gas Theft Hotline** at **703-750-4570** or the **Corporate Security** office at **703-750-4370** or **703-750-4246** if you see suspicious activity. ☉

## Ask for ID

**W**ashington Gas representatives wear company identification and will present it upon request. Call Washington Gas at **703-750-4370** or **703-750-4246** if you have security-related questions. ☉

## Spring Safety Tips

**R**emember these important safety tips as you begin your spring cleaning or for any time of year:

- ☉ Keep the area around gas appliances clear of all flammable substances or objects — especially gasoline, paints, adhesives, cleaning solvents and oily rags, which create a fire hazard.
- ☉ Any natural gas appliance located in a garage or similar location must be installed according to the applicable building code, so that all burners and burner ignition devices are at least 18 inches above the floor.
- ☉ Don't use or store flammable products, such as those mentioned in the first point above, in the same room or area where a water heater or any other gas appliance is installed.
- ☉ Keep dryer exhaust piping free of lint buildup to help prevent fire hazards.
- ☉ Always light your gas grill with the top open. A natural gas grill is intended for outdoor use and should never be used indoors.

**Keep your gas appliance owner's manuals available and refer to them regularly. Find more safety information at [www.washingtongas.com](http://www.washingtongas.com).** ☉

## Energy Assistance Contacts

**I**f you are having trouble paying your natural gas bill, call **Washington Gas** at **703-750-1000** as soon as possible to resolve the problem.

Maryland Energy Assistance: Call the **Maryland Department of Human Resources Energy Assistance Program** at **800-352-1446**. Inquire about the **Washington Area Fuel Fund** at **888-318-WAFF (318-9233)**. ☉