

Gas Leaks Allies

Natural Gas Experts Challenge Baker Administration on Safety

Urge Repair of Worst Gas Leaks and Immediate Attention to Environmental and Safety Issues

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BOSTON, MA—The Gas Leaks Allies, a consortium of 26 Massachusetts gas experts and researchers, today called on the Baker Administration to immediately address natural gas safety and environmental issues together rather than simply replacing our aging, leak-prone gas distribution system.

After last fall’s Merrimack Valley gas explosions, the Commonwealth contracted with Dynamic Risk to provide a “comprehensive and technical safety review resulting in recommendations for improvement.” The Gas Leaks Allies find the recently released [Phase One](#) of their report lacks concrete, measurable recommendations to ensure public safety.

In addition, the report endorses accelerated replacement of and investment in the current gas system. Instead, the Gas Leaks Allies urge swift action to repair the worst leaks and implement the solutions we have now to heat our homes and cook our food.

“The report frames safety and ‘environmental concerns’ in opposition, yet both are about public safety,” commented Zeyneb Magavi, who participated in two listening sessions as a community representative and member of Mothers Out Front. “We need to address immediate gas system safety along with the climate impacts of gas so we can protect our overall safety, our property, and our health for coming decades.”

The Gas Leaks Allies hoped for a strategic plan that addresses all risks to public safety and recommends specifics such as redefining leak classification to more readily identify explosive leaks, keeping valve boxes clear to enable rapid shut off in an emergency, and adding redundancy to safety protocols. Instead, the report makes general statements such as:

- “Ensure that pipeline safety is a significant consideration across all relevant government agencies.”
- “Identify accountability and responsibility within government agencies.”

Most of the fifty-four pages include concepts like these that are not technical, measurable, or prescriptive enough to improve gas safety.

These shortcomings call into question the report’s value. Estimated Phase One costs are \$822,796, and in total, Phases One and Two are set at \$1,990,284. Additionally, the report has been delivered ten weeks late, suggesting that our gas safety issues are larger than either our Department of Public Utilities or Dynamic Risk anticipated. The final report will almost certainly not be delivered by the June 30 deadline. For almost two million dollars, many hazardous leaks could be found and fixed.

Given the self-stated goal of the assessment “to provide recommendations that, if implemented, will enhance the safety of the natural gas pipeline distribution systems in the Commonwealth,” the Gas Leaks Allies said that the Phase Two report should:

- Take a rigorous approach to risk management instead of simply adopting the utility focus areas
- Outline systems that account for inevitable human error with best practices for all operating procedures, not just for emergency preparedness
- Account for both short and long term infrastructure investments in light of the Global Warming Solutions Act

“Instead of speeding up replacement of the gas system, as Dynamic Risk currently recommends, we urgently need to change course—doubling down on what caused the Merrimack Valley explosions in the first place is not the solution,” states Ania Camargo, Gas Leaks Allies. “We’re depending on the Baker Administration to protect our homes and neighborhoods now as we move quickly to safer, healthier, renewable energy.”

Gas Leaks Allies

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