

DANGEROUS AMERICAN GAS PIPELINES

Gas pipeline explosion in San Bruno, California in 2010. 4 people killed and 51 injured

USA Today has published shocking results of journalist investigation on the condition of the gas distribution networks in the USA. For the last 10 years, since 2004, there have been more than 1,700 significant gas leaks resulting in 135 deaths, 600 injuries, and about \$2 billion in damages. In other words, gas pipeline explosions leading to the destruction and loss of lives happen every other day in the USA.

Experts say that most of the explosions are caused by the poor condition of gas pipelines. The analysis of federal statistics data, thousands of pages of the reports from regulating bodies and gas companies, has shown that there are at least 30 thousand miles (48 thousand km) of cast iron and 56 thousand miles (90 thousand km) bare steel gas pipelines, which cause severe accidents.

For over several decades National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), regulating bodies, experts and insurance companies investigating the cause of the explosions have been warning about the poor condition of the gas pipelines and the need of their replacement.

Cast iron pipelines cause most of the major destruction. It has to be said that the vast majority of over 1,000 gas utilities operate very little or none of the most vulnerable

cast-iron mains, the largest share is concentrated in heavily populated areas with a higher risk of catastrophic consequences. About 83% of cast-iron mains are in 10 states, mostly in the Northeast. More than half the iron pipe is operated by just 10 utilities. And one third of it is buried in and around New York, Boston and Detroit.

Bare steel pipelines, most of which had been in operation since the end of 1960s, cause slightly less problems. Gas companies take various measures for service-life extension, invest in expensive cathode protection and provide regular inspections and diagnostics.

Bob Ackley, Pipeline Safety Expert of Gas Safety USA Consulting, compares the pipelines with a ticking bomb and thinks that their destruction is only a matter of time.

Gas pipeline replacement works are currently underway, but this process takes time and investment capital. Replacement of one mile of old cast iron pipelines costs over 1 million dollars and in big cities the costs will be several times more. A USA Today investigation shows that old pipeline replacement will generally take 10–20 years, but might take almost 50 years in some cases.

Source: usatoday.com