

Gas pipeline explodes; blaze seen for miles

STEVENS, Wash. (AP) — Flames exploded from a natural gas pipeline meter station Monday night, shooting high into the air near this south-central Washington community, authorities said.

No injuries were reported. After burning fiercely for two hours, the flames diminished when the supply of gas was shut off, said Owen Zuro, a spokesman for Northwest Pipeline Corp.,

which owns the station and gas pipeline.

Zuro theorized that the 26-inch pipeline, which runs from the San Juan Basin of Utah to Sumas, Wash., could have been ruptured by an earthslide although the pipeline is buried throughout its length.

Witnesses said the blaze was visible for 20 miles.

"I've never seen anything like it," said Dave Henderson, a

Skamania County sheriff's deputy. "It was just a huge torch."

Officials blocked off the area for a half mile around the 75-foot clearing where the station was located.

The flames had not spread outside the clearing into adjacent woods when Northwest Pipeline employees from Battle Ground and The Dalles arrived to shut off valves on both sides of the blaze.

Zuro said shutting off the

pipeline valves to extinguish the blaze would leave 16 miles of the line without gas.

The move leaves the communities of Stevenson and North Bonneville without natural gas. Zuro said between 35-40 residences are supplied by the gas in North Bonneville and between 125-135 homes use gas in Stevenson.

"We'll lose those two towns, they'll be without gas service,"

said Zuro. "There's nothing we can do. No other towns on the gas line will be affected." No damage estimate was immediately available.

The meter station was located about two miles west and a mile north of Stevenson, a small community which sits along the Columbia River on the Oregon-Washington border.

Henderson said the nearest house was at least a mile away from the blaze.

OLCC

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completely. All-campus are out, so sales (of kegs) are down."

The Kappa Sigma fraternity held an all-campus party last weekend in which 20 15-gallon kegs were purchased. According to Steve Studebaker, social chair of that fraternity, the keg law didn't hinder them from buying kegs, but he admits, "it puts a responsibility on whoever buys the keg."

Studebaker adds, "I'm not 21, but I take someone with me when I buy the beer."

Kappa Sig's all-campus was their first one in a year, and Studebaker says "So far we're okay, so we might try it again."

As long as the advertisements are kept "discreet" and the news of the parties not widely circulated, fraternities should be safe, Studebaker says.

Other fraternity members agree that so far the law hasn't affected them. They say they still buy as many kegs as ever, but they buy them more often for private functions.

"This law just puts more of a strain on the campus community," says Dave Steil, president of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon house, adding that he's aware of the potential "OLCC crackdown." Steil isn't sure if his house will have its outdoor keg in the spring, because "obviously they didn't pass it (the law) just to look at it."

Gary Sandstrom, OLCC liquor control officer, says it's too early to predict repercussions of the law, but "if there's a decrease in illegal sale, that means the law is doing what it's supposed to do."

Paul Patrick Distributing Co.,

plans a survey to compare keg sales from a year ago to see if sales have decreased because of the new law. "There is no question there has been a definite drop in sales," he says.

"Most have shifted to bottles already," Patrick explains, saying he is still concerned the public does not realize potential penalties.

"We're liable too," he notes, "and we've been ignorant of the law. A kid got busted, and we'll probably get fined because we didn't fill out the forms to the nth degree."

David Whitbread, executive secretary of Oregon Beer and Wine Distributors, calls it an "anti-consumer type bill," saying the law will only cost consumers more. He contends that many distributors have raised the dock prices of keg beer because of the time it takes to fill out forms.

"Tavern people say there's no way they can maintain a bar and check people's license plates at the same time," he says, calling the new law a "hassle."

The three local OLCC enforcement officers act as a police agency, according to enforcement officer Jim Stevens. "Ninety-five percent of our work is investigating licensing and five percent is enforcement," he says. "We act in an advisory capacity. If we get evidence (of keg violation) or request from an agency, we would examine the wholesaler's records."

A record of keg sales is kept by the licensee for a two-year period, available at all times for inspection by OLCC representatives.

Stevens says the sales and tap receipts are the "one and only step" they take in tracking down keg violators. This method is good, he says, assuming the keg buyers put down the correct address. But "there are a lot of ways to beat the system."

Will party life change in Eugene? It's too early to tell, but there's a potential risk involved in sponsoring a Saturday-night kegger. And as Whitbread puts it, "maybe quart bottles will become a better status symbol than beer in kegs."



Photo by Erich Boekelheide

Take a long look at these kegs. They may be a thing of the past for legally immature students. Trouble is brewing as OLCC enforcement of ID requirements makes the buying of kegs riskier and more troublesome. The kegger, once a campus tradition, is disappearing faster than a foamy head.

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