

United States Senate

September 30, 2020

The Honorable Howard R. “Skip” Elliott
Administrator
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Administrator Elliott,

We write to urge you to direct the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) to halt Enbridge, Inc.’s activities at the compressor station in Weymouth, Massachusetts, as you investigate the station’s safety following an equipment failure and emergency shutdown. In light of the recent accident and concerns about the station’s safety, we urge PHMSA to immediately suspend operations at the Weymouth compression station and conduct a thorough review of the natural gas leak and the station’s ongoing activities.

According to Enbridge’s letter to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, the Weymouth compressor station experienced a gasket failure on a sump tank during commissioning activities September 11, 2020.¹ The incident released 169,000 standard cubic feet of natural gas at ground level.² This accidental gas leak led on-site employees to trigger the emergency shutdown system.

On September 24, 2020, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) approved the request of Enbridge’s subsidiary, Algonquin Gas Transmission, LLC, to place the Weymouth compressor station into service so that it can commence operations by October 1, 2020.³ The recent unplanned gas release has given additional credence to the existing concerns about the operation of the Weymouth compressor station. The quantity of natural gas released during the gas leak emergency was equivalent to the average daily natural gas consumption of more than 930 Massachusetts homes.⁴ Concerns have been raised that this amount of gas, vented at ground level, could have possibly been ignited by a spark from a passing vehicle and caused a fire or an explosion.⁵ This incident clearly demonstrates that we must do more to understand the dangers that the Weymouth compressor station poses to public health and safety.

¹ Letter from Enbridge, Inc. to Thomas Cushing, Air Permit Chief, MassDEP (Sept. 11, 2020), <https://d279m997dpfogl.cloudfront.net/wp/2020/09/Enbridge-letter-Sept-11-2020.pdf>.

² Letter from William T. Yardley, Exec V.P., Enbridge, Inc., to Senators Edward J. Markey and Elizabeth Warren (Sept. 23, 2020).

³ Rich McGuire, *Letter to Chris Harvey Re: In-Service Authorization*, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (Sep. 24, 2020), https://elibrary.ferc.gov/eLibrary/filelist?accession_num=20200924-3034.

⁴ Congressional Research Service, *Email to Office of U.S. Senator Markey* (September 17, 2020)

⁵ Marie Szanislzo, *Opponents slam Weymouth natural gas compressor station after leak*, Boston Herald (Sept. 12, 2020), <https://www.bostonherald.com/2020/09/12/opponents-slam-weymouth-natural-gas-compressor-station-for-leak/>.

In a 2017 letter responding to our concerns about this same facility, PHMSA Acting Deputy Administrator Howard W. McMillan wrote, “PHMSA does have the authority and responsibility to inspect the pipeline facility, documentation, and records during construction and thereafter. [...] If our inspectors find issues or problems related to non-compliance during construction or operation of the pipeline facility, PHMSA will issue a compliance action to achieve and maintain pipeline safety, and to ensure the pipeline is in compliance with the regulations.”⁶ An emergency leak is unacceptable, and we ask that you fulfill your responsibility and conduct an investigation into this issue to protect public safety.

Instead of allowing Enbridge to operationalize the Weymouth compression station by October 1, 2020—so soon after an emergency shutdown and gas leak—PHMSA should ensure that the health and safety of site workers and the Fore River community are protected. Weymouth is a densely populated coastal area with an estimated 3,100 people per square mile, and the location of the compressor station is within 1.5 miles of schools with more than 3,000 students enrolled.⁷ The safety of compression station workers and the people of Fore River should be of paramount concern.

Thank you for your attention to these requests, and we look forward to your prompt reply. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please contact Senator Markey’s staff at 202-224-2742.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

⁶ Letter from Howard W. McMillan, Acting Deputy Adm’r PHMSA, to Sen. Edward J. Markey, July 7, 2017.

⁷ Miriam Wasser, *Confused About The Weymouth Compressor? Here's What You Need To Know*, WBUR (Dec. 2, 2019), <https://www.wbur.org/earthwhile/2019/06/19/proposed-weymouth-gas-compressor-explained>.