



STATE OF MAINE
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

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Testimony of the Maine Public Utilities Commission

Neither For Nor Against

LD 1473, An Act to Require Utilities to Monitor Meters for Natural Gas Leaks

April 24, 2025

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology (Committee), my name is Deirdre Schneider, testifying neither for nor against LD 1473, An Act to Require Utilities to Monitor Meters for Natural Gas Leaks on behalf of the Public Utilities Commission (Commission).

LD 1473 requires a gas utility to monitor every meter under its jurisdiction for leaks and report to the Commission annually on the number of leaks identified and any action taken by the utility to address those leaks. It requires the Commission to contract with a qualified third-party to assess the utility's compliance with the monitoring requirement in a frequency determined by the Commission. It also requires the Commission to adopt rules to implement these requirements.

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) establishes baseline standards for the frequency of leak surveys for all gas utilities. Maine regulations overlay the minimum federal requirements and require gas utilities to use a risk-based process to determine the frequency of leak surveys. This risk-based process results in gas utilities monitoring their systems in developed areas monthly, quarterly, and annually for leaks. Meters are part of the system monitoring activities.¹ If a leak is detected, Commission rules require that the utility classify and repair the leak within the timeframes established in rule and report the results of these efforts to the Commission on a monthly basis.² The Commission's gas safety program team conducts frequent field inspections and inspects the utility's leak monitoring and repair records annually.

While codifying in Maine law that natural gas leak monitoring and detection should be conducted on an annual basis provides additional assurances, certain requirements in LD 1473 appear to be redundant. The Commission is concerned with the requirement that a third-party inspector be hired to assess compliance as the Commission is already doing this work. Additionally, there could be significant costs to this duplicative assessment, which will impact ratepayers, and it is unclear if we would be able to find qualified entities to conduct this work. Furthermore, the Commission has existing rules related to the monitoring and detection of leaks; therefore, the rulemaking requirement may be unnecessary. Existing rules can easily be amended if new monitoring requirements are enacted.

¹ Chapter 440, Gas Utility Meter Performance, Accuracy, Testing, and Related Standards contains meter testing requirements. Meter testing is different than leak monitoring and detection. Meter testing is done to ensure that meters are correctly measuring gas flow.

² Chapter 420, Safety Standards for Natural Gas and Liquefied Natural Gas Facility Operators.

Finally, PHMSA is close to completing an Advanced Leak Detection rulemaking that will, if enacted, significantly strengthen the federal regulations relating to leak detection and repair.

I would be happy to answer any questions or provide additional information for the work session.