



LOCAL

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## Utility finds leaks in dozens of natural gas meters in Bonney Lake development

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Puget Sound Energy inspectors have found natural gas leaking from dozens of meters it has checked in the state's largest new development.

The company discovered the leaks after it dispatched a team of inspectors and repair workers last week to Tehaleh when multiple residents reported the odor of leaking natural gas.

Early on, the team was finding leaks in about one out of every two meters. But by Friday, the rate had slowed to 85 leaks among the 600 homes checked.

Puget Sound Energy spokesman Charlie Gadzik said the utility plans to check all of the 850 gas meters in the 4,700-acre Tehaleh development and make repairs as necessary.

Tehaleh is the state's largest residential and commercial development. The site, a former Weyerhaeuser timber tract, is in the first stages of its buildout. If the developer is successful in completing its plans, some 25,000 people could eventually live there.

Gadzik said the leaks discovered so far don't pose an immediate danger. They are small, he said, and the meters are all outdoors so the leaking gas is rapidly dispersed. Chances are miniscule that enough gas could accumulate to threaten an explosion, he said.

The tell-tale odor of leaking natural gas can be detected in quantities as small as parts per billion, he said.

The leaks are occurring where the gas service line connects with the individual gas meters, Gadzik said.

The company staged a major effort late last week to inform residents of the issue and to answer questions about the problem. The inspection and repair effort was slowed this week by a snowstorm that dumped as much as 14 inches of snow on the Bonney Lake area. As the snow has melted, said Gadzik, the company has doubled the number of inspectors checking meters.

The connections are being fixed if residents are home, he said. Repairing those connections requires shutting off the gas while the fixes are made. After gas service is restored, pilot lights for furnaces and hot water tanks have to be relighted, a process that requires access to the homes.

Repairing the connections and relighting the appliances takes 45 to 60 minutes for each home, he said.

The company is investigating why the spate of gas leaks has occurred, the company spokesman said. One theory not yet confirmed is that the connection hardware on the meters is defective, allowing small leaks.

"It doesn't appear to be an installation workmanship issue," he said.



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## Puget Sound Energy still seeking cause of 161 gas leaks found in Bonney Lake area tract

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Puget Sound Energy repair crews are working this week to remedy dozens of small natural gas leaks afflicting homeowners in the state's largest mixed-use development, Tehaleh near Bonney Lake.

PSE spokesman Charlie Gadzik said the cause of the epidemic of leaks, first discovered last week, is still unknown.

"We have several theories, but we're not saying what those are until we confirm our findings," he said.

Once those findings are confirmed, the utility will know whether the Tehaleh leaks are the symptom of a problem likely to crop up elsewhere in its natural gas network in the Puget Sound area or whether those issues were specific to the development.

The Bellevue-based utility inspected all the home meters in the development, 889, and discovered 161 leaks.

Those leaks were small enough, he said, that they didn't pose any risk of an explosion, fire or asphyxiation. The leaks were all discovered outside the homes near the individual gas meters. The company first launched the communitywide inspection effort after a cluster of homeowners reported smelling gas near their houses.

All of the homes in Tehaleh have been built in the past few years. The 4,700-acre development was once a Weyerhaeuser timber tract.

Under the development agreement with Pierce County, some 25,000 people could eventually occupy homes in the area if the county approves the second phase of the development plan.

Tehaleh at completion will contain several commercial office buildings, retail stores and public buildings. The development now consists of single-family residences, an elementary school, a clubhouse and restaurant, and a community center that includes a coffee shop and offices.

Gadzik said residents whose natural gas connections remain to be fixed will be receiving notices in the form of door hangers notifying them of the need to repair their connections. Homeowners will have to be present during the repair process because workers must shut off the gas to accomplish the fix.

That service interruption will require workers to access homes to relight gas appliances and furnaces inside.

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