

The Dangers of Natural Gas Lines

Natural gas lines supply reliable, energy-efficient fuel to furnaces, ovens, emergency generators, and other systems and appliances. While convenient, these lines can pose significant safety risks. Here's what you need to know.



The Problem with Natural Gas Lines

Natural gas is a reliable and widely used fuel source, and natural gas distribution lines and meters are of course necessary to our supply of the fuel. But unprotected gas lines, as well as gas meters, can be dangerous, especially if they're located near your building. That's because if they're accidentally struck by a vehicle or damaged during digging, they can explode or cause a fire, leading to injury or death. As you might expect, these accidents can also destroy your property, which can result in costly repairs.

How to Stay Safe

To prevent accidents, it's important to know where gas lines and meters are located in relation to your building. You can identify them on quality control inspections or find the information in construction documents. Since natural gas service lines often exist underground, you can also identify them by calling 811, the national Call-Before-You-Dig number, or typing "call before you dig" into a search engine, to identify hidden pipelines. (Keep in mind that, while it's important to know where gas lines and meters are located in general, if you're planning an excavation project, it's a must. Call 811 or visit your state 811 center's website to request that the location of buried utilities be marked with paint or flags so you don't unintentionally dig into an underground line.)

Like any code, including those from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), International Fire Code (IFC), or the Federal Code of Regulation (FCR), the code you'll need to follow for gas line protection will depend on its adoption by the local authority having jurisdiction, which is the person or office charged with enforcing regulatory compliance in your area. (In many states, the AHJ is the state fire marshal.)

In a perfect world, all of your piping and meters will be marked, but that's rarely the case, especially if markers are not required by code. Even so, during building design, your property's high-traffic areas will likely have been identified so gas piping can be avoided in those areas.

Property owners have a responsibility to protect the best interests of the property's residents, employees, and visitors. If an inspection of your gas pipeline or meters turns up a concern, contact your AHJ to ask questions about the requirements you must follow and how to stay safe. If you smell a leak or suspect that a pipe has been struck, call 911 immediately. First responders will request the gas company's help if the piping needs to be capped or shut off at the main valve. Today, most dispatch centers will call both the gas company and the fire department if they know a gas rupture has occurred.

Learn More

Learn more about natural gas lines and meter safety by reading a sampling of the codes that are outlined below.

Questions? Contact your HAI Group Risk Control Consultant anytime.

Areas of Code to Reference:

NFPA 54 (Fuel gas code) Section 7.7.2.2

"Gas meters shall not be placed where they will be subject to damage, such as adjacent to a driveway, under a fire escape, in public passages, halls, or where they will be subject to excessive corrosion or vibration"

International Fire Code

Chapter 3, *Section 603.9*

"Above ground gas meters, regulators, and piping subject to damage shall be protected by a barrier complying with section 312 or otherwise protected in an approved manner"

Section 312: 404.7

"Piping installed above ground shall be securely supported and located where it will be protected from physical damage"

Federal Code of Regulations

49 CFR 192.353

"Customer meters and regulators: Location. (a) Each meter and service regulator, whether inside or outside a building, must be installed in a readily accessible location and be protected from corrosion and other damage, including, if installed outside a building, vehicular damage that may be anticipated"

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