

Underground gas storage plan puts Sacramento residents on edge

Karen Massie, KXTV.com (Sacramento television), 9-16-10

SACRAMENTO -- Plans for a giant underground natural gas reservoir have some Sacramento residents on edge.

Garnet James grew up in Sacramento's Glen Elder neighborhood. Six years ago he returned to live there. "I like it because it's quiet, nice, has a park for the grand kids and it's family oriented," James said.

But since a gas pipeline explosion rocked San Bruno last week, James is worried that same thing could happen to his neighborhood.

For the last four years, Sacramento Natural Gas Storage (SNGS) has been developing a plan to reactivate a 379-acre gas field deep underground near Power Inn Road and Junipero Street.

James doesn't like the idea. "It's like San Bruno. Nobody was taking care of the pipes there and the whole neighborhood went up," James said. "I think (underground gas storage) would be dangerous here. Who's going to take care of the pipes and them. Will they do it once a week, once a month or once a year? We just don't know."

SNGS spokesman Jim Fossum countered, "We've been very concerned about safety, and in fact, we have designed this to be the safest and the most green project in the history of the industry."

Plans call for the project to have six well heads hooked to a pipe stretching more than a mile underground to natural gas sandwiched in sandstone. On the surface, two miles of 16-inch pipe will connect to pipelines that feed the Sacramento Municipal Utility District's gas-fired power plants.

Fossum said, "We will put pipelines (leading away from the well heads) at least six feet below the surface. The federal regulation says they should only be three feet below."

He added the pipes will have "three automatic shut-off valves which shuts the pipeline down in three seconds in case of a problem."

Pipes will also be thicker than required -- about three-quarters of an inch, according to Fossum.

About 75 percent of about 700 nearby homes and businesses have signed up to be paid for storage rights because the reservoir, almost a mile deep in the earth, will extend under their properties. Homeowners and business owners have already begun receiving \$500 annually for storage fees. If the gas is injected into the ground, some property owners could get up to \$2,000 or more.

But James said he's not interested. "It's not worth it. Lives are more important than money," he said.

SNGS said the underground gas reservoir was in existence for millions of years before it was discovered in 1970. By 1988 it was depleted and has been sitting empty since then.