

Officials respond to natural gas well blowouts

Elizabeth Larson, Lake County News, 4-27-10

GLENN COUNTY – Authorities in Glenn County responded late last week to two natural gas blowouts in the county's unincorporated area.

Glenn County Sheriff Larry Jones said his agency responded to two gas well-related emergencies last Friday, one on County Road 44 near Road TT close to Orland and the second on Road 99 near Road 7, just east of Interstate 5 north of Orland.

Jones said both gas well blowouts required evacuations but no injuries were reported.

The first event in the Orland area was resolved in a matter of hours with a well worker going in and turning off a valve, said Jones.

The second well blowout, however, was more problematic, Jones explained. “Methane gas could have been a real threat,” he told Lake County News in a Monday e-mail message.

When a sergeant and two deputies responded to the second blowout on Roads 44 and TT Friday, they found gas and dirt shooting upward, Jones said.

Fire and support agencies were detailed, an Office of Emergency Services command post and a hot zone were established, a large area was cordoned off, and one family evacuated and housed in the nearby city of Willows overnight, he explained.

Jones said he and two of his lieutenants also responded to the scene, along with Glenn County Environmental Health.

That second well stopped its eruption in the early morning hours of Saturday, Jones said.

Both well blowouts required a large personnel response, with the two emergencies placed on separate radio networks, and additional dispatchers and supervisors were called in to duty. Jones said the response taxed the small agency's resources.

Regarding the second well, “So far, twenty-one loads of concrete have been poured down the well to seal it off,” Jones said Monday.

Venoco Inc., with corporate offices in Colorado, owns the second well, Jones said.

The company's Web site reported that Venoco acquired its interests in the Willows natural gas field in Glenn County in 1996 from Mobil, “operates substantially all of the field production” and has an average working interest of 65 percent.

Between the Willows and Grimes fields – the latter in Colusa County – the company reported that it has approximately 92 producing natural gas wells.