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Georgia Public Service Commission

(404) 463-6526
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Atlanta, GA 30334-5701

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psc.ga.gov

Docket No. 37082

DOCKET# 37082
DOCUMENT# 225801

City of Sparta Gas System
P. O. Box H
Sparta, GA 31087

REF: Public Awareness Inspection # JS25-012

☒ Certified Mail ☐ Regular Mail ☐ Email

Attention: Mr. Allen Haywood

On March 24, 2025, a representative of the Georgia Public Service Commission Pipeline/Facilities Safety Office conducted an inspection of your gas system. The enclosed inspection report numbered JS25-012 is provided for your information and file.

In conjunction with this inspection report, Staff has recommended the following enforcement(s):

Enforcement Action:

- ☐ Notice of Probable Violation
- ☐ Notice of Probable Violation with Proposed Civil Penalty
- ☐ Notice of Amendment

Enforcement Letter:

- ☐ Warning Letter
- ☐ Letter of Concern

Enforcement Notification:

- ☐ Observed Issue
- ☒ No Violation

Please review and respond to this report in accordance with the attached Instructions for Responding to Enforcement Actions, Enforcement Letters, and Notifications Issued by the Georgia Public Service Commission. Please refer to Docket No. 37082 in your response.

Please let me know if there are any questions concerning this report at (404) 985-4271 or mthebert@psc.ga.gov. Thank you for your continuing contribution toward increased pipeline safety.

Sincerely,

Michelle Thebert

Michelle L. Thebert
Director, Office of Pipeline Safety/Facilities Protection

COMMISSIONERS

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REPORT OF NATURAL GAS SAFETY

INSPECTION NO: JS25-012

OPERATOR: City of Sparta Gas System

INVESTIGATOR: Jason Smith

INSPECTION DATE: March 24, 2025 REPORT MAILED DATE: March 11, 2026

Any questions concerning this report may be directed to the above address or by telephoning (404) 463-6526.

1. PURPOSE OF INSPECTION

To conduct an inspection of the Operator's Public Awareness Program (PAP) for compliance with the minimum federal standards in 49CFR §192.616.

2. CONTINUING VIOLATIONS

Violation	Description	Inspection#	Date
199.101	Anti-Drug Plan	JJ20-014	3/10/2020
191.11	Distribution system: Annual report.	JS20-042	11/16/2020
192.147	Flanges and flange accessories.	JS20-042	11/16/2020
192.605(a)	Each operator shall prepare and follow for each pipeline, a manual of written procedures for...	JS20-042	11/16/2020
192.479(a)	Each operator must clean and coat each pipeline or portion of pipeline that is exposed to the...	JS20-042	11/16/2020
192.615(a)(2)	Each operator shall establish written procedures to minimize the hazard resulting from a...	JS20-042	11/16/2020
192.603(c)	General - The Associate Administrator or the State Agency that has submitted a current...	KR22-009	4/20/2022

3. CLEARED VIOLATIONS

4. NEW VIOLATIONS

5. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS/COMMENTS

SEE ATTACHED INSPECTION REPORT

CITY OF SPARTA NATURAL GAS SYSTEM / PUBLIC AWARENESS INSPECTION
INSPECTION NUMBER JS25-012 / DOCKET NUMBER 37082

On March 24, 2025, Pipeline Safety Staff began reviewing the City of Sparta's Public Awareness Plan. On May 13, 2025, Staff reported to the city of Sparta Natural Gas System to perform the Public Awareness Program inspection.

During this inspection, the Operator was represented by:
Amanda Akins - Utility Director
Bobby Gunter - Gas Superintendent
Peter Schultz - Harp and Associates (consultant)

Commission Staff was represented by:
Jason Smith - Lead Inspector
Jack Hewitt - Pipeline Safety Inspector

At the time of this inspection the City of Sparta Natural Gas System had seven (7) previously existing probable violations. These violations are addressed under Follow-Up Inspection Number JS25-011.

NOTICE OF PROBABLE VIOLATION

As a result of this inspection, Staff found that the City of Sparta Natural Gas System was in probable violation of the minimum federal safety standards; specifically:

1. 49 CFR §192.615 - Emergency plans.
   (c) Each operator must establish and maintain liaison with the appropriate public safety answering point (i.e., 9-1-1 emergency call center) where direct access to a 9-1-1 emergency call center is available from the location of the pipeline, as well as fire, police, and other public officials, to:
   (1) Learn the responsibility and resources of each government organization that may respond to a gas pipeline emergency;
   (2) Acquaint the officials with the operator's ability in responding to a gas pipeline emergency;
   (3) Identify the types of gas pipeline emergencies of which the operator notifies the officials; and
   (4) Plan how the operator and officials can engage in mutual assistance to minimize hazards to life or property.

   STAFFS COMMENTS: PHMSA PAP Effectiveness Inspection form Question #20 and #11 states; Do records indicate liaisons established and maintained with appropriate fire, police, other public officials, and 911 emergency call centers in accordance with procedures?

   Sparta's Public Awareness Program for Pipeline Operators, section 2.06 'Maintain Liaison with Emergency Response Officials' states: "There is a program in place to hold a liaison meeting with all Emergency Responders, Public Officials and Contractors (Excavators) on a 1 year basis with each attendee receives a copy of the parts of the Emergency Procedures Manual that affects their portion of any response in an Emergency." Then it states: Any emergency personnel unable to attend these meetings after being invited by operator will have a copy of the Emergency Procedures Manual Delivered to them and they must sign for the manual when received."

   During this inspection, the Operator was not able to locate any documentation to show liaisons with Emergency Officials and Public Officials being done in 2021, 2022 and 2023. Amanda Akins - Utility Director (began position on June 1, 2024), did make sure a liaison meeting with public officials and emergency responders took place on 8/08/2024. However, there was no record of the Hancock Sheriff, City of Warthen Fire Department, Washington County Emergency Officials & Public Officials (that were listed under Section 1.4 'Stake Audience Identification') attending that liaison meeting, or the Operator following up with them since they did not attend.

PROBABLE VIOLATION: Sparta Natural Gas System failed to maintain annual liaison with appropriate Emergency Officials and Public Officials.

2. 49 CFR §192.616 - Public awareness.
   (c) The operator must follow the general program recommendations, including baseline and supplemental requirements of API RP 1162, unless the operator provides justification in its program or procedural manual as to why compliance with all or certain provisions of the recommended practice is not practicable and not necessary for safety.

   a) PHMSA PAP Effectiveness Inspection form Question #10 states: Did the delivery of materials and messages meet or exceed the baseline delivery frequencies specified in API RP 1162 (1st Edition), Table 2-1 through Table 2.3?

   STAFFS COMMENTS: Sparta's Public Awareness Program for Pipeline Operators, section 'Establish Baseline Delivery Frequency for Each Message' states: for the Affected Public group (customers and residents along the distribution system), twice annually by newspaper ads, or written letters and written surveys.

   During this inspection, the Operator was not able to produce records showing the Affected Public received the materials/messages in 2020, and then only received PAP materials/messaging once in 2021. Sparta Natural Gas was not able to locate any records to show liaison or delivery of public awareness messaging to Emergency Officials and Public Officials in 2021, 2022 and 2023.

   PROBABLE VIOLATION: Sparta Natural Gas System failed to meet the baseline delivery frequency as required by API RP 1162.

   b) PHMSA PAP Effectiveness Inspection form Question #23 states: Were needed changes and/or modifications to the program identified and documented based on the results and findings of the program effectiveness evaluations?

   STAFFS COMMENTS: During this inspection, Staff reviewed appendix B 'Program Evaluation Results' of the Operator's Public Awareness Program. The November 2022 effectiveness evaluation of public awareness program survey results for Emergency Officials states: Sparta will send out an extra information packet and survey to this audience group until it raises an already acceptable 75% "Botton-Line Results" scoring to 80% or higher.

   The November 2022 effectiveness evaluation of public awareness program survey results for Excavators states, Sparta elects to send out an extra information packet to this audience group. This included liaison meetings, supplemental messaging via newspapers, television and handouts, and the use of GA811 mass survey. Sparta and their natural gas consultants will get together and look at the survey questionnaire and look to enhance questions in the survey.

   Staff asked Sparta Natural Gas System if they could demonstrate these supplemental enhancements took place. The Operator was not able to demonstrate Emergency Officials and Excavators received extra messaging.

   PROBABLE VIOLATION: Sparta Natural Gas System failed to implement the modifications to their Public Awareness Program based off the results of their 2022 effectiveness evaluation.

PROPOSED CIVIL PENALTY

Under Commission Rule 515-9-1.01, by virtue of the authority vested in the Commission by law and pursuant to orders issued by the Commission on May 4, 1967, July 6, 1967, April 23, 1968, and October 29, 1970, all Rules and Regulations prescribed by the United States Department of Transportation applicable to the "Transportation of Natural and Other Gas by Pipeline: Minimum Safety Standards" (C.F.R. 49, Parts 191 and 192) are by this Rule made the Rules and Regulations of the Georgia Public Service Commission for the safe installation and operation of all natural gas transmission and distribution facilities by companies subject to the jurisdiction of the Commission within this State.

Under Commission Rule 515-9-3-.08 (Written Formal Notice of Violation), the Commission may propose a civil penalty in conjunction with this notice of probable violation. Further, the City of Sparta is subject to civil penalties under O.C.G.A. § 46-2-91(b) which states that: Any operator which violates any rule or regulation of the commission prescribed pursuant to subsection (i) of Code Section 46-2-20, or which fails, neglects, or refuses to comply with any order after notice thereof, shall be liable to a penalty not to exceed the maximum penalties provided for in 49 C.F.R. Section 190.223.

Staff has reviewed the circumstances surrounding the probable violations cited in this report and has recommended the civil penalty/penalties listed below. Please note that this recommended amount is less than the amount authorized by Georgia law.

Item #	Code / Rule	Description	Proposed Penalty
1	§192.615(c)	Liaison	$2,500.00
2	§192.616(c)	Public Awareness	$2,500.00
TOTAL PROPOSED PENALTY			$5,000.00

Please review and respond to this report in accordance with the attached Instructions for Responding to Enforcement Letters Issued by the Georgia Public Service Commission.

OPERATOR RESPONSE FORM

Operator Name: City of Sparta Gas System

Informal Conference Requested: Yes ☐ No ☐

Docket Number: 39082

Responses required within **30 days of electronic mail.** Provide the following information for this report:

Response to Inspection Number:_____

Type of Enforcement Action(s) cited in report:			Informal Conference Requested	
☐ Notice of Probable Violation (NOPV)	☐ New	☐Continuing	☐ Yes	☐ No
☐ Notice of Amendment (NOA)	☐ New	☐Continuing	☐ Yes	☐ No
☐ Warning Letter	☐ New	☐Continuing	☐ Yes	☐ No
☐ Letter of Concern	☐ New	☐Continuing	☐ Yes	☐ No
☐ Observed Issue	☐ New	☐Continuing	☐ Yes	☐ No
☐ Proposed Civil Penalty	$ _____ PCP $ Amount (Total for report)			

Indicate below (A-E) based on the type of Enforcement Actions in this report: (Check all that apply)
Complete a separate copy of Page 2, Operator Response to Enforcement Action, for each cited item.

A. Response for **Notice of Probable Violation** (with and without proposed civil penalty):
   1. ☐ Written statement indicating that corrective measures have achieved Compliance or
   2. ☐ Written plan of action outlining the corrective measures that will be taken to achieve compliance and when compliance is anticipated.

B. Response for **NOA**:
   1. ☐ Contested: Attach written explanation, information, or other material in answer to the allegations in the Notice of Amendment stating your reasons for objecting to the NOA, in whole or in part; or
   2. ☐ Not Contested: Explanation, information, or other material believed to warrant modification of the NOA in whole or in part; or
   3. ☐ Written request for clarification. (Attached)

C. Response for **Continuing** and/or **Existing** violations:
   Current status, updates, expected completion dates, proposed modifications, etc., of the continuing and/or existing violations, even if this information was previously provided. Referencing a previously filed response letter, as status, updates, etc. alone is not sufficient for this response. Failure to provide this information may result in formal interrogatories from the Director through data requests.

D. Response for ☐ **Letter of Concern** / ☐ **Warning Letter**
   I acknowledge receipt of the Letter of Concern/Warning Letter:_____
   SIGNATURE / TITLE

   Additional Comments: (Optional) _____

   _____

   _____

E. Response for **Observed Issue** and **No Violation**: (Optional Response)
   Staff requests that the Operator acknowledge receipt of the Observed Issue/No Violation in writing, or by submitting an email to the FPU Director

Operator Response to Enforcement Action

Enforcement Action for:_____ ☐ New Violation ☐ Continuing Violation
Enter Code / Commission Rule (Complete a separate attachment for each enforcement action)

Enforcement Action(s) cited in report:	Conference Requested:	
☐ Notice of Probable Violation (NOPV)	☐ Yes ☐ No	$_____
☐ Notice of Amendment (NOA)	☐ Yes ☐ No	Proposed Penalty for this violation
☐ Warning Letter	☐ Yes ☐ No	
☐ Letter of Concern	☐ Yes ☐ No	
☐ Observed Issue	☐ Yes ☐ No	
☐ Proposed Civil Penalty	☐ Yes ☐ No	

OPERATORS RESPONSE: _____

Response Provided by: _____ Date:_____
Name / Title

Internal use only:

Lead Inspector: _____ Date Response Reviewed:_____

Actions Acceptable: ☐ Yes ☐No Re-inspection Needed:☐ Yes ☐ No Clear Violation:☐ Yes ☐ No

Supervisor Review by:_____ Date Reviewed:_____

Additional Enforcement Recommended: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Director Review

Approved: ☐ Yes ☐No Schedule Special Follow-up Inspection: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Cleared Violation: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:_____

Filings:
For all written responses or any other official correspondence, the Operator shall file the response at the following address:

Ms. Sallie Tanner, Executive Secretary
Georgia Public Service Commission
244 Washington Street, SW
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

The Operator must file **five (5)** copies of any response and/or official correspondence, as well as a CD with an electronic version of the response in Microsoft Word and/or a PDF, if applicable.

Informal Conference:
Any Operator who chooses to request an informal conference shall request such a conference through emailing the Director (michellet@psc.state.ga.us), calling the Director (404-463-2765), or selecting the "Request Conference" choice.

Civil Penalty Payments:
Certified check for the full amount of the recommended civil penalty or consent agreement amount made payable to the Georgia Public Service Commission. The Operator's name, applicable Docket No., and Inspection Report No. must be included on the certified check. Mail payment to:

Ms. Michelle Thebert, Director, Facilities Protection Unit
Georgia Public Service Commission
244 Washington Street
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Hearing Requests:
The Operator has the right to request a hearing before the full Commission to contest the alleged probable violations, recommended civil penalties, and all other proposed actions of enforcement. A request for a hearing must be submitted in writing and in accordance with Commission Rule 515-2-1-.04. The Operator must include a statement of the issues that you intend to raise at the hearing. The issues may relate to the allegations, new information, proposed compliance order, proposed civil penalty, or any other recommendation for enforcement action. Please refer to Commission Rule 515-9-3-.11 and O.C.G.A. § 46-2-91 for assessment considerations upon which civil penalties are based. An operator's failure to specify an issue may result in a waiver of the right to raise that issue at hearing. The request must also indicate whether or not the Operator will be represented by counsel at the hearing.

Open Records and Trade Secret Filings:
The Operator is advised that any material provided to the Commission, and all materials prepared by the Commission, including the Notice of Probable Violations and any Orders issued in this case, may be considered public information and subject to disclosure under the Georgia Open Records Act (O.C.G.A. § 50-18-70 et seq.). If you believe that any portion of your response material is security sensitive, privileged, confidential or may cause your company competitive disadvantages and would qualify for protection under the Commission's "Trade Secret Rule" (Commission Rule 515-3-1-.11), you must, along with the complete original document clearly marked "TRADE SECRET" on each page, provide a second copy of the document with the portions you believe qualify for trade secret treatment redacted, and an explanation of why you believe the redacted information qualifies for such trade secret treatment. Should the Commission receive a request for disclosure of any "TRADE SECRET" material, you will be notified, if after review, the materials and your provided justification are deemed not to meet any exemptions provided in the Georgia Open Records Act. You may appeal the Commission's decision to release material at that time. Your appeal will stay the release of those materials until a final decision is made.

BEFORE THE GEORGIA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
STATE OF GEORGIA

IN THE MATTER OF:	)	
	)	
City of Sparta Gas System	)	**DOCKET NO. 37082**
	)	
	)	
	)	

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, hereby certify that I have this day served a copy of the within and foregoing document on the following persons via email and/or United States Mail as follows:

*Sallie Tanner, Executive Secretary
Georgia Public Service Commission
244 Washington Street, SW
Atlanta, GA 30334

*The Honorable Allen Haywood, Mayor
City of Sparta Gas System
P.O. Box H
Sparta, GA 31087
allensusan6@bellsouth.net

*Michelle Thebert, Facilities Protection Unit Director
Georgia Public Service Commission
244 Washington Street, SW
Atlanta, GA 30334

Respectfully Submitted this _____ day of March 2026:

Cathy Nesbitt

Cathy Nesbitt, Administrative Assistant
Georgia Public Service Commission
Facilities Protection Unit
244 Washington Street, SW
Atlanta, GA 30334