



10 Peachtree Place NE, 9th Floor
Atlanta, GA 30309

Pipeline safety Sewer lateral safety



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Natural gas piping damaged during cleaning operations



A sewer line penetrated by natural gas piping

Even though natural gas pipeline incidents are uncommon, sewer lateral work can become potentially dangerous when a cross bore is present but not identified.

Background

Utilities install underground lines using trenchless technology known as horizontal directional drilling (or directional boring) to pull cable, conduit and pipe underground. This installation method causes minimal impact on the surrounding area and minimizes environmental disruption.

Before beginning directional boring, Atlanta Gas Light follows the proper procedures for determining and marking other underground infrastructure, including sewer laterals. After existing utility lines are marked, we are required to hand-dig and find these lines before we drill.

Unfortunately, there are instances when an underground sewer line is not identified properly before directional boring activities. It's possible that a natural gas pipe can be inadvertently "pulled" through a sewer line.

Potential danger!

The presence of a utility line in a sewer line is known as a cross bore. A cross bore can go undetected for months or even years. Eventually, a sewer backup may develop and you may be called to remove the sewer blockage.

While it is common practice to use a mechanical rotary device to cut out the blockage, doing so without locating the underground utilities or without a visual camera inspection of the sewer line could be dangerous.

What you can do to stay safe.

Before working on a sewer lateral, the following steps should be taken to prevent damage to the infrastructure:

- Call Georgia 811, per state law, before you dig by either dialing **811** or visiting georgia811.com to request that your utility lines be professionally marked free of charge.
- Use a camera to determine if the sewer lateral is obstructed by other infrastructure.
- Inquire if a natural gas line or other utility has been installed or upgraded on the property.

If a natural gas pipe is found in the sewer line:

- **Stop** all work immediately.
- **Call** Atlanta Gas Light at **877.427.4321**.
- **Report** it as a natural gas emergency.
- **Be sure** to let the customer service representative know you have discovered a cross bore. Afterward, we will take the appropriate next steps to remove the natural gas line and make the area safe.

While you're working, be aware that a natural gas line may have been hit if you:

- **See** blowing dirt, discolored vegetation or continued bubbling in standing water
- **Hear** a hissing or roaring noise of natural gas near an appliance or line
- **Smell** the distinctive, rotten-egg odor associated with natural gas. Natural gas is colorless and odorless, so we add a chemical odorant called mercaptan for easy detection. This odorant has a

distinctive smell of rotten eggs. You should act any time you detect even a small amount of this odor in the air. Be aware that "odorant fade," while uncommon, can occur. Odorant fade occurs when a physical or chemical process causes the level of odorant in the gas to be reduced. This can happen in both existing gas pipe and new installations. Plumbers should always use a combustible gas indicator when working around natural gas facilities to detect the presence of natural gas.

Note: Be aware that some individuals may not be able to detect the odorant because they have a diminished sense of smell, olfactory fatigue or because the odor is being masked by other odors in the area. Certain conditions may cause the odorant to diminish so that it is not detectable. Some gas lines, due to their unique function, may not have odor at all.

Should an emergency arise at or near a gas pipeline, please do the following:

- **Do not** attempt to repair the damage yourself.
- **Leave** the area immediately and move a safe distance away from the potential leak, while avoiding any action that may cause sparks.
- **Avoid** using any sources of ignition, such as cell phones, cigarettes, matches, welders, flashlights, electronic devices and motorized vehicles, as natural gas can ignite from a spark or open flame, possibly causing a fire or explosion. Natural gas is non-toxic, lighter than air and displaces oxygen. In severe cases, if not used properly, natural gas can also lead to asphyxiation.
- **Call 1.877.572.3342** or **911** once you are out of the area of the suspected leak and in a safe place. Stay away from the area until Virginia Natural Gas or emergency personnel indicate it is safe to return.

If you are in the Atlanta Gas Light service territory, please call **877.427.4321**



Online Survey: Please take a moment to complete a survey about natural gas safety and excavation activity by scanning the QR code or visiting <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/GYK25RJ> to help us make sure we are keeping our communities safe.