12 States Warned About Faulty Propane

STEVE LEBLANC, Associated Press Writer

BOSTON (AP) — An Illinois-based gas distributor has warned officials in at least 12 states that some propane deliveries may have lacked enough of a chemical that gives a distinctive smell to the normally odorless gas, enabling customers to detect possible leaks.

Aux Sable Liquid Products said in a letter to public safety officials dated Sept. 8 and obtained by The Associated Press that the odorant is typically added at its Morris, Ill., plant.

A company spokesman on Thursday confirmed the contents of the letter. He said the company was alerted to the potential problem by a customer who delivers the gas to smaller distribution centers.

"We were made aware that there were possibly some retail deliveries that were not sufficiently odorized," said Aux Sable spokesman Scott Seibert. He said the company is currently reviewing its propane odorization system.

The company said the propane could have been shipped to Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Maryland, Virginia and Vermont.

In the letter, Aux Sable said it has ceased shipments from the Illinois plant while it investigates. The company has alerted the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission and local fire marshals and attorneys general in each of the states.

"The lack of odorant is not itself dangerous," Aux Sable Vice President Katherine Dodds wrote in the letter. "If odorant is absent, however, it is less likely that a propane leak will be detected."

The company said it's working to ensure all future propane deliveries are tested.

The decision by Aux Sable to suspend shipments follows an investigation by the Massachusetts attorney general's office into a fatal explosion in July at a condominium development in Norfolk, Mass.

The state fire marshal found a propane leak caused the blast that killed a construction worker. Other workers said they did not smell a leak. The propane was delivered to the site from a facility in Westfield, Mass.

"We do have a sense based on this and other information that at least some of the non-odorized gas in Massachusetts would have originated from Aux Sable," Coakley told the AP on Thursday.

The July explosion was traced to a propane leak from a basement heating unit at The Village at River's Edge condominium project, which was under construction. Three workers were seriously injured in the blast, and one later died. Two firefighters and three other people also were hurt.

Coakley said the information from Aux Sable suggests the problem could reach beyond Massachusetts. She said investigators still have questions about what happened. She say they want to review Aux Sable's records to try to track where the odorless propane might have been delivered.

Investigators last week checked propane at 56 distributors across Massachusetts that received propane from the Westfield company. Six had propane without enough of the odorant, which gives propane its telltale "rotten eggs" smell.

The Westfield site is owned by DCP Midstream LLC, headquartered in Denver. The company is a joint venture between Spectra Energy and ConocoPhillips.

A spokeswoman for Midstream said the company has turned over its records to Coakley's office. She said the propane is odorized before it is delivered to the company, which conducts its own tests to confirm the propane has an odorant before it is picked up by distributors.

Fire officials say there are some commonsense steps that propane users can take to protect themselves, such as not smoking or lighting candles if they use piped propane in their homes and not using propane grills within 10 feet of a home or other structure.

Source URL (retrieved on *12/05/2013 - 7:26am*):
http://www.chem.info/news/2010/09/12-states-warned-about-faulty-propane