CT Governor Plans to Ban Gas Pipe Cleaning Procedure

SUSAN HAIGH, Associated Press Writer

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — Gov. M. Jodi Rell said Tuesday she's preparing to ban a gas pipe cleaning procedure blamed for a deadly power plant explosion in February.

The announcement of Rell's executive order came hours after a state commission created by the Republican governor recommended the state ban gas blows, the use of flammable gas to clean out piping, until new national standards are put in place.

Rell's decision to halt the practice was met with praise by the U.S. Chemical Safety Board, the Washington, D.C.-based independent federal agency that investigates serious chemical accidents, including the Kleen Energy power plant explosion in Middletown.

"Governor Rell has provided a model that other states and the federal government should follow," safety board CEO Rafael Moure-Eraso said. "This unsafe practice needs to stop."

The state commission on Tuesday approved seven recommendations it will officially present to Rell in the coming days. The list includes the gas blow ban, more training for regulatory personnel and creating a coordinating council of state agencies to share information during the construction of large power plants.

The commission's chairman, acting Department of Public Safety Commissioner James "Skip" Thomas, said some of the recommendations may be enacted by Rell using her executive authority and others may require legislative approval.

"I'm comfortable that almost all of the seven recommendations that we put forth are going to be approved," he said. "What we tried to do in this whole process was be reasonable — what's reasonable, what's going to ensure public safety."

The under-construction Kleen Energy Systems LLC plant exploded Feb. 7 when something ignited natural gas and air that had accumulated during a gas blow, in which high-pressure gas is forced through pipes. Six workers died, and 50 were injured.

The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration in August imposed $16.6 million in fines against companies involved in the blast. The fines, the third-highest imposed for an accident, stemmed from claims of 371 safety and workplace violations.

The Chemical Safety Board has said gas blows are inherently unsafe and has urged companies to use other methods. In August, a representative of the board called on

Connecticut to adopt legislation prohibiting flammable gas from being used to clean gas piping.

State officials have said that at the time of the blast there was no state agency charged with overseeing the gas blow.

The commission led by Thomas is the second of two groups created by Rell following the explosion. The first was charged with identifying the cause of the blast and any contributing factors.

Thomas' panel was asked to recommend legislative and regulatory steps that can be taken to make sure a similar tragedy doesn't happen again.

The group's other recommendations include requiring an applicant of a power-generating plant to pay for one or more special inspectors to help the local fire marshal and building inspector and adopting various updated fire and building code regulations.

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