More to Be Done to Make Pipelines Safer

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Authorities could do more to prevent massive oil spills in Utah like two costly ones near Red Butte Creek in 2010, but they'll have to decide whether it's worth the cost, according to a report released this week.

The review, commissioned by Salt Lake City and authored by the nonprofit Pipeline Safety Trust, points out that the state can go beyond the minimum pipeline safety standards outlined by the federal government.

"I would like it to be safer," Carl Weimer, the trust's executive director and study's author, told The Salt Lake Tribune. "But maybe Utah doesn't want it to be safer."

The report comes two years after leaks in a Chevron pipeline spilled nearly 55,000 gallons of crude oil in Salt Lake City's eastern foothills. Since then, Chevron spent about $42.6 million on spill-related expenses, including $36.6 million in cleanup efforts on Red Butte Creek, $500,000 to Utah, and $1 million to Salt Lake City.

Recommendations include clearer standards for leak detection and damage reports, more transparency, and the creation of a citizen pipeline safety advisory board that would work with oil and gas industry officials to periodically review the pipelines.

Weimer estimates there are 347 miles of natural gas and hazardous liquid transmission lines underground in the 500-square-mile Salt Lake valley. He says that's far too many for regulators to monitor closely.

"Although the federal government is responsible for setting minimum pipeline safety standards, Utah can adopt additional or stricter safety standards," the report says. "To date, Utah has not chosen to seek any authority over hazardous liquid pipelines or interstate natural gas pipelines."

Mayor Ralph Becker responded to the report, saying Salt Lake City needs to take the lead on protecting the community rather than leaving the job to the industry.

Becker said he plans to bring the report to state lawmakers in hopes of getting stricter pipeline safety rules on the books.

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