Pipeline Rupture Leads To Well Contamination

Julie Carr Smyth, AP

Environmental regulators worked to determine the cause of a significant spill of a clay lubricant during construction of an underground pipeline in eastern Ohio. Southeast Directional Drilling Co. reported that it had released an unknown quantity of the lubricant, bentonite, in Harrison County, northeast of the village Cadiz. The spill occurred during construction of the ATEX pipeline, which is being built to carry liquid petroleum products from Pennsylvania to Texas.

The clay substance, which can be used to lubricate cutting tools in drilling operations, ran into nearby Conotton Creek and onto the properties of two homeowners, affecting their private drinking water, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency spokesman Chris Abbruzzese said Thursday. The cleanup was nearly complete, and the company was providing clean drinking water to the families, he said.

"No violations have been issued yet, but they did impact a waterway," he said. "The agency is investigating all enforcement actions available at this time." Houston-based Enterprise Products Partners' ATEX pipeline will extend across 265 miles in Ohio and parts of Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Indiana, connecting to existing lines. Construction began this spring. Of the 4,000 construction jobs involved, an estimated 1,500 were to be in Ohio.

The spill wasn't connected to natural-gas drilling, called fracking, also occurring in eastern Ohio, Abbruzzese said. The company planned to address the homeowners' drinking water issues, including possibly drilling them new wells, he said.

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