

# The Recorder

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## Dominion outlines pipeline construction, safety

BY JOHN BRUCE • STAFF WRITER



*Harley Gardner, left, and Kim and Lloyd Bird spoke with Dominion external affairs manager Carla Picard.*

MONTEREY — Dominion is working on route adjustments for the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline, Dominion manager of external affairs Emmett Toms told the Highland County Local Emergency Planning Committee during a special meeting May 31.

LEPC secretary Melissa Dowd asked if Dominion has finalized its route through Highland.

“We’re still evaluating it. The answer is no. That’s still under discussion,” Toms said.

Toms added Dominion is hoping the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission will issue a final environmental impact statement July 21.

Dominion has hired Spring Ridge, a consortium of contractors, to build the pipeline in a series of spreads, or sections, each manned by 600-800 workers, explained Jace Tyner, corporate safety director for Rockford Corp. of Heath, Texas. Tyner reviewed some of the fundamental construction activities.

Pipe would be engineered, strung, bent and welded before pressure testing and x-rays of seams.

A horizontal drill company would be hired to tunnel underground where necessary.

Public roads would be open during construction, except when equipment crosses over them.

The nominal depth of the pipeline would be four feet from the top to the surface, and landowners should require a deeper depth if needed for farming operations.

LEPC chair Harley Gardner asked about the pipeline operating pressure. The maximum pressure would be 1,440 pounds per square inch.

Dowd remarked the slide show construction stage illustrations “are really pretty,” but don’t show the mountainous terrain of Highland. Deforestation and ridgetop removal would be part of construction, Dowd pointed out. The current proposal is to take off the top of mountains in southern Highland. “You’d be lucky to find soil to plant grass.”

The blasting would be just enough to fracture the rock for removal, Toms said.

Dowd envisioned a ridge at Back Creek. “You have to flatten the top enough to work it. You put the rock back. Are you going to hydroponically seed it?”

Dominion would use a plant mix, but there would be no trees. Sand would be trucked in. Sand and plastic mesh would cushion the pipe from the bedrock.

“We are a community of loggers,” Dowd said. “Do we have an opportunity for local folks to bid?”

Toms said the Dominion website has a vendor opportunity section where the loggers can find information and sign up for work.

“Anything we can buy from this community, we’ll buy here,” Tyner added. “We try to support the community. We’re not bad people. We’re good people. We care about families and the communities we’re in.”

Tyner said Spring Ridge is a consortium of world-class, top-of-the-line companies “working for the big guys.” Every warehouse yard would have its own licensed medical clinic.

“Our safety records are impeccable,” Tyner said.

There would be site-specific safety plans, and employees trained in CPR, first aid and confined space entry. Of the 600 to 800 employees at each spread, there would be 60 inspectors and Dominion would have a safety inspector as well.

LEPC member Dot Terry noted the employees might have to wait for an ambulance because of limited volunteer rescue squad manpower.

“We’re very limited,” Dowd agreed.

ACP safety lead Billy Mercer said he was reviewing the latest draft of the safety plans. Spreads range from 15 to 20 miles in hilly areas. The company used to build pipelines without cell phones, but most employees don’t remember that, Mercer said. The impact on the community would be minimal, Mercer said.

Gardner asked him about access to the safety plans. Mercer replied they would not be available because they contain employees’ personal information, but an overview could be provided.

Dowd said the LEPC needs confidence, and the information needs to be accurate.

Mercer said there would be an increase in traffic and lots of trucks with welding equipment. He said the company looks at the impacts on school bus routes and tries to avoid disrupting major events.

Sheriff David Neil asked whether Dominion would provide its own security.

Dominion corporate security senior investigator Thomas Butler said each spread would make its own decision on how security would be provided.

Gardner asked about an operations center to contact about security issues, and Butler said Dominion has a “fusion center” to contact. “We don’t want protesters from across the U.S. coming in and disputing your community,” Butler said.

Dominion eastern area transmission operations director Kevin Zink explained that above-ground pipeline safety valves, spaced about 10 miles apart, would have at least two redundant communications links — microwave, low-orbit satellite, and, if available, cell phone.

Dowd asked about fencing around the valves, and Zink said a six-foot chain link fence with barbed wire on top would enclose each valve in a roughly 1,600 square-foot area.

The pipe is coated internally and externally to prevent corrosion, Zink noted.

The pipeline right of way would be periodically inspected by helicopter and on foot. “We’re starting to use drones for inspection,” Zink added.

“The first priority in an emergency is for you to give us a perimeter and let us go in and deal with it,” Zink said. Public awareness meetings will take place in Harrisonburg in late fall. Dominion

hopes to start clearing trees in November, with the bulk of construction in 2018 and 2019. The construction partners have committed to having 50 percent or more of the workforce from the local community.

LEPC member Larry Hough remarked about his many trips to and from Staunton, and that he has seen a lot of trucks “who don’t make the curve. I’ve seen many trailers that don’t make it at 40 feet.”

Mercer said Dominion would hire a pipeline transportation contractor to do a transportation plan.

Asked his overall impression of the meeting and whether he had any remaining concerns, Gardner said, “I feel like Dominion is going to work with us meeting all the needs of safety and responses if there are any incidents. Dominion’s safety program is top line. I am confident they will continue to place significant emphasis on that program.

“Our role as an all-hazard planning organization within the county has not changed. I feel the meeting was informative and answered my questions. Future meetings will present a better picture of Dominion’s resources needed in our county to meet all incident needs without putting a strain on local resources,” Gardner said.