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Pipeline coating believed to be deadly

MONTEREY — Bill Limpert of Little Valley has discovered the rust resistant coating used on gas pipelines contains cancer causing and poisonous elements.

“The fusion bonded epoxy coating used on the pipes for the Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley pipelines contains carcinogenic and toxic properties. This is especially concerning since this material is likely degrading from UV sunlight exposure and powdering off the pipes,” he said. “It is even more concerning in karst areas where it might quickly enter private drinking water wells and springs.”

Limpert sent a letter to the Virginia Department of Health asking for an assessment of the risk to public health from this material.

“The pipes for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline have been stored outside for over two years, and beyond the manufacturer’s and industry recommended time frames,” Limpert stated in his letter. “The pipes for the MVP have been stored outside as well. These pipes are coated with 3M Scotchkote Fusion Bonded Epoxy 6233, which degrades, and chalks, or becomes powdery under ultraviolet light (UV) from sunlight. The pipes have not been treated with an additional UV resistant layer to protect them from UV degradation.

“Industry experts advise me that the fusion bonded epoxy is likely already degraded due to this exposure, with the outer layers chalking, and shedding off of the pipe. Beside the obvious public safety issue with this material failing, and exposing the pipes to corrosion, and possible catastrophic failure once highly explosive gas is pumped through them, this shedded material is a threat to public health through ingestion or inhalation. It is likely that this degrading material is becoming airborne wherever these pipes are stored, including the large pipe storage yards, and along the pipeline right of way. As such, this material is likely being inhaled by the nearby public.

“Even more worrisome is the likelihood that this carcinogenic material will enter our groundwater when the pipes are placed underground, and subject to the pressure and abrasive

action of soil, gravel, and rocks that are backfilled over them. It is a well known that water tends to run along the outside of pipes that are placed underground, and in this case that water will be dislodging and transporting the shedding fusion bonded epoxy, and very likely sending it into our drinking water aquifers," Limpert continued.

"This dire circumstance becomes even more dangerous for citizens living in karst areas along the path of these pipelines who have no public water available, and rely on their wells and springs as their only source of water. In these areas there is rapid movement of groundwater through established limestone channels with little or no filtration. Dye trace studies in karst confirm that pollutants can travel as far as 8 miles, leaving many citizens vulnerable. The fusion bonded epoxy coating that detaches from the pipe could quickly enter their drinking water wells and springs. This may have already happened along sections of the MVP that are located in karst where pipe is now in the ground.

"I am by no means an expert in these matters, but I trust that the Virginia Department of Health has that expertise, and will act to protect the public health. I hereby urge the Virginia Department of Health to call for a moratorium on any further placement of pipe into the ground for the ACP and MVP until this potentially serious health issue can be fully assessed. Measures should also be taken to keep the shedding fusion bonded epoxy from becoming airborne at pipe storage locations. If the assessment concludes that health impacts are possible the pipes should be treated or replaced to assure that public health is not compromised. This may also require cleanup of the pipe storage locations."

He urged the department to check the MSDS data sheet for the Scotchkote 3M Fusion Bonded Epoxy Coating 6233, which was applied to the pipes for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and the Mountain Valley Pipeline. "I was pleased to see the Virginia Department of Health guidance documents to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality regarding potential drinking water impacts from the Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley pipelines, particularly in karst areas," he wrote. "It is unfortunate, however, that DEQ chose, for the most part, to ignore your guidance. Please strive to prevent this from happening in this matter, if your assessment indicates a risk to public health," Limpert said.

— John Bruce