

Utility to feds: No unsafe construction on Atlantic Coast

Mike Soraghan, E&E News reporter
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A section of the Atlantic Coast pipeline under construction. Jenny Mandel/File/E&E News

The builders of the Atlantic Coast pipeline are contesting federal officials' allegations of unsafe construction practices on the line.

Dominion Energy Inc., which is leading construction on the \$7.5 billion project, said inspectors looked at the pipeline at a time when a court had suspended all construction activities and before construction was finished.

Dominion is asking the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration to withdraw a warning letter it sent to the company in July ([Energywire](#), Aug. 15).

"This misunderstanding could lead the public to conclude that there are problems with [Dominion's] construction practices, a claim that is not supported by the record," Dominion executive Brian Sheppard wrote in a [letter](#) received by PHMSA on Aug. 26 and posted yesterday.

PHMSA reported finding two West Virginia worksites where crews had laid pipe in ditches lined with rocks, which make the line more vulnerable to damage or stresses as a result of movement or settlement. The agency decided against seeking a fine, instead sending a warning letter.

Dominion says PHMSA officials incorrectly acted as though construction had been completed on the pipeline when it wasn't. On Dec. 7, 2018, the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals had issued a stay that suspended all construction work, except stand-down activities. The company said the

construction crews set the pipe in the trenches temporarily for safety and to protect the environment.

"The pipeline's location at the time of the audit was not reflective of its final resting location, nor were the trench conditions final," the letter said.

PHMSA's inspection started four days later. The company at the time was seeking approval from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for its stabilization plans. Since then, the letter said, the pipes in those areas have been constructed, inspected and backfilled to proper specifications.

"We are committed to meeting the highest standards for quality, safety and environmental protection throughout construction and we are proud of the job we're doing," Dominion said in a statement to E&E News.

Construction on the 600-mile, West Virginia-to-North Carolina natural gas pipeline remains on hold while the U.S. Supreme Court decides whether to hear appeals filed by the pipeline builders and the federal government ([Energywire](#), Sept. 3).