



## Emergency Responders' Guide to Natural Gas Emergencies



**We just want  
you to be safe.**

Dispatch: 800-372-1645  
Avista Customer Service: 800-227-9187

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## Protecting Life and Property

Fire and police departments are often the first responders in public safety emergencies. In instances involving natural gas, Avista's primary objective is to protect life first, then property. This pamphlet includes information on natural gas safety. You can learn more about Avista's Emergency Response Planning by contacting your local Avista office.

## Upon Arrival at the Scene

- **Contact Avista Dispatch at (800) 372-1645 (Call 911 in absence of a dispatch number)**
- **Secure the scene. Keep the public clear, if possible at least 330 feet away, per DOT recommended guidelines.**
- **Assess the hazards.**
- **Park upwind and away from natural gas pipelines. Migrating natural gas smells like rotten eggs or sulfur.**
- **STAY CLEAR OF DAMAGED GAS PIPELINES.**
- **If necessary, turn the gas riser valve off at the meter or appliance. (See Meter Shut Off section.)**
- **Prohibit smoking, flares and the operation of electrical equipment in the immediate area.**
- **Pipe diameter relates to how far to evacuate.**

## Natural Gas Pipelines

Avista uses pipelines as a reliable means to deliver natural gas to over 329,000 customers. Natural gas pipelines are extensively regulated by federal and state codes, and Avista routinely monitors and maintains its pipeline facilities to assure safety.

Natural gas pipeline systems consist of transmission and distribution main lines, generally installed alongside streets and highways, and service lines that run from the distribution main lines into homes and businesses.

Avista's pipelines are indicated by the use of aboveground yellow markers that display a 24-hour emergency response number. These yellow markers are found along the general route of the pipeline. It is important for you to know these yellow markers do not show the exact location of distribution pipelines.

## Pipelines in Your Response Area

Your department can access transmission pipeline maps by registering with the National Pipeline Mapping System (NPMS) at [www.npms.phmsa.dot.gov](http://www.npms.phmsa.dot.gov). NPMS will provide a list of pipelines by county or zip code, including the contact information of pipeline operators. (Note the majority of Avista's natural gas pipelines are distribution.)

Avista continually monitors the integrity of our facilities used to deliver gas to customers. For information on Avista's Integrity Management program, please call **(800) 227-9187** (may include High Consequence Areas or HCAs).

Avista's  
uses yellow  
markers to  
indicate its  
natural gas  
pipelines are  
nearby.



## Properties/Flammability of Natural Gas

- Natural gas is comprised mostly of methane.
- Natural gas is colorless and usually odorless, but Avista adds a scent similar to rotten-eggs or sulfur for easy detection.
- Natural gas is non-toxic and non-poisonous but can cause asphyxiation or possibly explode when trapped in enclosed spaces.
- Natural gas it is lighter than air and diffuses rapidly outdoors.
- Natural gas in a 4% to 15% gas-to-air mixture is highly flammable and easily ignited by heat or sparks.

## Signs of a Natural Gas Leak



We add the scent similar to rotten eggs or sulfur to our natural gas, so you'll know right away if there's a problem.



Gas can hiss, whistle or even roar as it escapes from pipelines.



Dirt blowing from a hole in the ground, an area of dead vegetation or bubbling in pooled water may indicate an underground gas leak. You may also see fire come up from or burn atop the ground.

## Escaping Gas Indoors/Outdoors

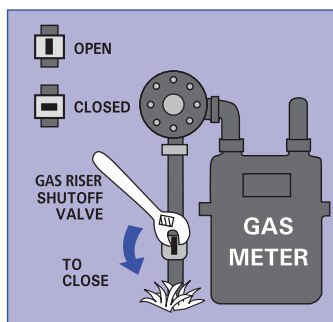
- Be cautious if you smell natural gas (smells like sulfur or rotten eggs)
- Do not flip switches or use cell phones and portable radios, which may cause a spark.
- Look for and eliminate all possible gas ignition sources.
- Open windows and doors to ventilate the gas.
- Turn off heating and air conditioning systems that bring air into the building, if appropriate.
- Check for gas accumulating in nearby buildings, basements and sewers.
- Only use a combustible gas indicator to check for natural gas.
- If necessary, reroute or restrict traffic until the gas leak is under control. Do not use traffic flares which can ignite the gas.
- Consult with Avista's first responders concerning how else to proceed safely.

## Natural Gas Fires Indoors/Outdoors

- Call Avista immediately (via dispatch or 911) if a burning structure has natural gas. Unseen pipeline/facilities damage can lead to gas migration in buildings, sewers and water lines.
- Never remove the gas meter, regulator or other facilities. Avista and state or federal regulatory agencies may need to test the operation of these facilities in their present configuration.
- Shut off the gas meter and tell Avista you did so. If a fire fueled by gas does not extinguish, the gas source may be coming from another source or outside.
- When a natural gas fire occurs outdoors, make no attempt to extinguish it unless life is in jeopardy.
- Spray water on surrounding combustibles in danger of igniting.
- Beware that underground natural gas lines may exist in a wildfire location and could rupture during a fire. (See additional wildfire precautions in the Electric section under Wildland Fires).

## Gas Meter Shut-Off

- If necessary, you can shut off gas where it leads to an appliance or at the gas meter.
- To shut off the meter, locate the valve on the adjacent pipe and give it a quarter turn in either direction using a large wrench. When the valve is crossways to the pipe, the line is closed.



- If you shut off a gas riser valve, LEAVE IT OFF. Only trained Avista personnel should turn it back on.
- NEVER SHUT OFF a valve that is buried or at a regulator station, even in emergencies. It may cause public safety concerns elsewhere.

## **Natural Disasters**

In the event of an earthquake, firestorm, wide-spread flooding or other large disaster, immediately tell Avista the locations of any line breaks, gas odors, submerged facilities or damaged structures that may have natural gas service. Do not shut off natural gas service to homes or businesses unless there is extensive damage to structures involved or a gas odor is present. When it is necessary, turn off the gas at the meter and leave it off until Avista arrives to inspect and restore service. If you must turn off service, remind affected residents never to use a barbecue or generator indoors.

## **Carbon Monoxide (CO)**

- CO is a colorless, odorless gas and is toxic.
- CO can be produced if there is insufficient oxygen during the combustion of any carbon-based fuel—heating oil, gasoline, diesel fuel, propane, kerosene, natural gas, coal or wood. (Such as a BBQ or generator)
- Malfunctioning appliances are often a cause of CO, as is the improper use of generators and barbecues indoors.
- Symptoms of CO poisoning may resemble the flu or include mental confusion, ringing in the ears or shortness of breath. Skin may turn pinkish and mucous membranes a cherry red.

## **Carbon Monoxide Detectors**

- Avista should be notified immediately of any situation involving a natural gas appliance suspected of producing CO.
- Avista will respond to calls concerning a CO detector that sets off an alarm if there is a natural gas appliance on the premises.
- Avista will test the area and attempt to discover the source of any carbon monoxide. Any malfunctioning appliances will be adjusted or turned off pending repairs.

## 811 Ground Marking Colors

While emergency responders will not be digging, it may be helpful in certain situations to know that some ground markings can indicate the approximate locations of various underground facilities (such as a wildfire). The colors here show the types of buried utilities often marked by service crews of 811 Call Before You Dig. Remember there is a two foot tolerance zone around the markings.

**ELECTRIC: RED**

**GAS-OIL: YELLOW**

**COMMUNICATION: ORANGE**

**WATER: BLUE**

**SEWER: GREEN**

**TEMPORARY SURVEY: PINK**

**RECLAIMED WATER/IRRIGATION: PURPLE**

**PROPOSED EXCAVATION: WHITE**



**Know what's below.  
Call before you dig.**

### For instructional safety videos

[myavista.com/er](https://myavista.com/er)

### For additional information

(800) 227-9187

[publicsafety@avistacorp.com](mailto:publicsafety@avistacorp.com)

[myavista.com](https://myavista.com)

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