

- Black Hills Energy

Black Hills Energy employees in Liberal responded to more than 175 suspected natural gas leak calls from customers after a mechanical failure caused an excess amount of harmless gas odorant to be released into the gas distribution system.

Natural gas at its source is odorless, so large-volume suppliers and utilities, including Black Hills Energy, inject the gas with mercaptan, a harmless chemical commonly said to smell like rotten eggs. The stench can be the first alert to a potentially dangerous natural gas leak.

“Safety is our first priority, no matter what,” said Ronnie Sumner, an operations supervisor for the Liberal area. “Even though we knew all those calls were probably generated by the odorant, not a natural gas leak, we immediately responded to every call.”



Eighteen Black Hills Energy employees, some from other Black Hills’ offices, blanketed the area into the night to make sure there were no actual safety issues.

“We thank all of our employees for the time and effort they put into responding to each and every call,” Sumner said. “We require a full leak investigation at the source of each call, which can take up to 45 minutes per location. Our ability to recruit employees from other locations

allows us to respond to issues of any scale.”

Sumner said no one should ever hesitate to report a suspected gas leak.

“Natural gas is a safe, dependable energy source, but incidents can occur,” he said. “If you suspect a leak, get everyone out of the building or the area immediately. Call 911 or the Black Hills emergency number, 800-694-8989, from another location. Indoors, don’t use phones, touch light switches, open or close windows and doors, or turn any electronics on or off. Any of those acts can cause static electricity, which can ignite leaking gas.”

Most gas leaks are caused by a customer’s faulty equipment, or result from someone striking a line while digging.

“As a friendly reminder, at least two days before you plan to disturb the soil, always Call Before You Dig by calling 811 toll-free to reach your state’s line locating service. A technician will come to the site and mark all underground pipes and wires at no charge before you start your project. It’s free, it’s safe, and it’s the law,” Sumner added.