



## CenterPoint Energy to Replace Service Lines That Might Contain Improperly Installed Couplings

### Replacement Project in 37 Minnesota Communities to Be Completed in 2005

MINNEAPOLIS, May 18, 2005 /PRNewswire-FirstCall via COMTEX/ -- Today, CenterPoint Energy (NYSE: CNP) announced a project to assure the complete removal of all couplings in the former Midwest Gas service area that do not meet standards. The project involves replacing up to 35,000 service lines in 37 Minnesota communities and will be completed in 2005.

(Logo: <http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20020930/CNPLOGO> )

"CenterPoint Energy takes this situation very seriously," said Tracy Bridge, director of government and public relations for CenterPoint Energy. "The safety of our customers and the integrity of our distribution system are our most important priorities. This replacement effort is reflective of that commitment," he added.

In 1993, CenterPoint Energy (formerly Minnegasco) purchased the Minnesota properties of Midwest Gas, an Iowa-based distributor of natural gas that at the time served 80,000 customers in Minnesota. Prior to this purchase, Midwest Gas had acquired North Central Public Service Co. in 1986. North Central Public Service Co. is the utility that originally installed gas service to all the customers acquired by Midwest Gas. An investigation by CenterPoint Energy has revealed that from 1959-1983, North Central Public Service Co. improperly used metal couplings (that were designed to join steel pipe) to join plastic pipe on some of its residential and commercial service lines. The Minnesota Office of Pipeline Safety reached the same conclusion after it investigated the December 2004 building explosion in Ramsey, Minn.

CenterPoint Energy is in the process of finalizing the list of customers who might have an improper coupling installation on their service line. At this point, the project includes up to 35,000 former Midwest Gas customers in 37 communities located north and west of Minneapolis. The service lines will be replaced with new plastic (polyethylene) pipe using heat-fused connections. The project is currently underway in Buffalo, Minn.

CenterPoint Energy's entire service area in Minnesota includes over 760,000 residential, commercial and industrial customers in more than 240 communities. Of those, 80,000 customers in 43 communities were part of the Midwest Gas system that was acquired in 1993. Of that group, up to 35,000 customers in 37 communities might have couplings that do not meet standards. All these customers:

- \* Had pipes installed from 1959 through 1983
  - \* Have plastic service lines
  - \* Are all part of the former Midwest Gas service area.
  - \* The replacement project does not apply to CenterPoint Energy's other 725,000 customers.

CenterPoint Energy will replace its service lines in the least disruptive way using a minimally invasive technique, and will work to restore customer properties to their original condition. The company will communicate with customers throughout the process to keep them informed of when it will be working on their property, the expected length of service disruption and yard restoration plans. In addition, the company will continue to communicate with city officials in communities affected by the project.

As always, CenterPoint Energy reminds its customers of two important ways they can help maintain the safety and integrity of our natural gas distribution system:

If you smell gas:

- \* Leave immediately. Do not use electrical switches, your phone, or anything that could cause a spark. Do not return until given permission by the utility or public safety officials.
- \* Go immediately to a safe location and call the CenterPoint Energy -- Emergency Gas/Leak Hotline: (612) 372-5050 or 1-(800) 722-9326.
- \* Call 911

- \* Alert your neighbors. Do not assume anyone else has reported the leak.
- \* Leave all repairs to properly equipped and trained utility technicians. Never try to repair a natural gas leak yourself.

If you plan to dig or excavate:

- \* Call ahead to Gopher State One Call (651) 454-0002 (metro area) or (800) 252-1166 (greater Minnesota) to have the location of underground utilities marked. It's the law.

To learn more about this project, call CenterPoint Energy at 612-372-4727 or 1-800-245-2377 or visit the Web site at <http://www.CenterPointEnergy.com/SrvcReplace> .

Headquartered in Houston, TX, CenterPoint Energy is a domestic energy delivery company that includes electric transmission and distribution, natural gas distribution and sales, and interstate pipeline and gathering operations. The company serves nearly five million metered customers in six states and has assets of about \$17 billion. With more than 9,000 employees, CenterPoint Energy and its predecessor companies have been in business for over 130 years. In Minnesota, CenterPoint Energy is the state's largest natural gas distribution company, serving more than 760,000 residential, commercial and industrial customers in over 240 communities. Home Service Plus(R), the company's non-regulated business in Minnesota, offers products and services in the categories of heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) and appliance repair, and HVAC and hearth equipment sales. Visit the Web site at <http://www.CenterPointEnergy.com> .

#### SOURCE CenterPoint Energy

Media Pager in Minnesota, +1-612-538-1234, or Rolf Lund, +1-612-321-4879, or Patty Pederson, +1-612-321-4609, all of CenterPoint Energy

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