

# Accidents, Compliance, and Safety Records of Williams Companies, Inc.

Oklahoma-based Williams Companies, Inc. has several dozen subsidiaries, including Williams Pacific Connector Gas Operator LLC. Williams Pacific Connector LLC identifies itself as the Engineering, Procurement and Construction Management contractor on behalf of the Pacific Connector Gas Pipeline LP. Among other pipelines, Williams Companies owns the Transcontinental Pipeline system (Transco), extending from southern Texas to New York City, and the Northwest Pipeline, transporting natural gas from Colorado to the Canadian border. The following summarizes accounts of compliance and safety records of Williams Companies subsidiaries since 2000.<sup>1</sup>

## 2002

- Williams was reported to be in financial distress and on verge of bankruptcy. (38)(19)
- Williams's own shareholders filed a class action lawsuit against it, alleged the company hid its failing financial conditions. (33)(56)

## 2003

- Williams paid \$20 million (along with Encana Company) in fines for reporting false data to manipulate the California natural gas market and paid California \$417 million to settle the case. (25)(56)
- (May 1) A 26-inch Williams Companies natural gas transmission pipeline failed near Lake Tapps, Washington, forcing evacuation of an elementary school and dozens of homes within a four-mile radius. The failure was determined to have been caused by Stress Corrosion Cracking. This was reportedly the fifth failure on this pipeline in eight years. (56)
- (December 13) Another section of the latter pipeline failed, this time in Lewis County, Washington due to Stress Corrosion Cracking and external corrosion. Gas flowed for three hours after the rupture before being shut down. This accident occurred despite the fact that earlier Stress Corrosion Cracking of the pipeline had resulted in the company reducing gas pressure by 20%. (56)

## 2004

- Williams was fined \$30,000 for a fire at a well in Parachute, Colorado. (47)

## 2007

- Williams agreed to pay \$290 million to settle the abovementioned class action lawsuit filed by its shareholders in 2002. (19)(32)(56)

## 2008

- (September 14) A natural gas explosion in Appomattox, Virginia (Williams-owned Transco) ripped a 32-foot section of 30"-diameter pipe from the ground. The pipeline spewed gas that was subsequently ignited when a power line came loose and sparked, causing a 1,100-foot diameter burn zone. Five people were seriously injured and property damage was reported to exceed \$3 million. (35)(56)
- (September 25) PHMSA issued a Corrective Action Order as a result of the above incident. The Order stayed in effect until November 3, 2011. (18)

**2009**

- Williams was fined \$952,000 for failure to monitor corrosion adequately with the Virginia pipeline explosion in 2008 cited above. (36)(43)(56)

**2010**

- A Transco Pipeline leak occurred in Texas and was not reported for 4 days. The ¼-inch diameter leak caused a reported \$57,000 in property damage. Operators on aerial patrol did not see the leak, rather it was found by an operator who saw some bubbles. (22)
- Williams was fined \$275,000 for failing to implement and/or maintain storm water measures to prevent potential pollutants during planned construction in Parachute, Colorado. State inspectors notified Williams (Bargath) in November 2010 of violations and told them to take immediate action. According to report, Williams did not fix violation for seven months. (8)(28)

**2011**

- (June) Williams was fined \$23,800 by PHMSA for failure to conduct annual inspections of natural gas compressors stations in Texas and Louisiana. (18)(56)
- (December 3) Transco Natural Gas Pipeline ruptured & exploded in Marengo County, Alabama. Flames shot 100 feet into the air and eight acres burned. Coating failure was blamed as cause. Reports stated that the corrosion was not recognized by Williams even though they claimed to have systems in place. (2)(18)(36)(56)(59)
- (December 6) PHMSA issued a Corrective Action Order with regard to the Marengo County natural gas explosion. (18)

**2012**

- (March 5) Transco/Williams was fined \$50,000 by PHMSA for failure to follow its internal policies for controlling external corrosion in a natural gas pipeline in New York. (18)(56)
- (March 29) A gas leak caused a fire at the Lathrop Natural Gas Compressor Station in Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania. Williams restarted the station and pumping of fracked gas within 24 hours despite a request from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection not to do so. DEP stated they were very clear in their request, but because it was not an official order no fines were issued. One ton of Methane was released. (2)(16)(56)(59)
- (April 9) Transco natural gas leak was discovered in Bergen, New Jersey. (18)(44)(59)
- A Williams-owned natural gas liquid (NGL) pipeline in Parachute, Colorado (population 1,000) began to leak on December 20. Parachute Creek runs through the small town, which is nestled next to the Colorado River. (8)

**2013**

- (January) Williams discovered the leak of NGLs in Parachute plant while working on construction to expand the plant. Reports said the leak was found by accident. The leak was stopped, but Benzene, a cancer causing agent that breaks down bone marrow, had contaminated the soil. Williams said the leak was not affecting creek. (8)(34)
- (March 8) Williams began cleanup of the Benzene leak (NGL) in Parachute, Colorado and notified authorities and landowners that the soil had been contaminated. No mention was made at the time that groundwater was poisoned. Reports said that Williams omitted reporting the spill/leak earlier because they estimated less than 25 gallons had leaked. (8)(12)

- (March 15) The public in Parachute was informed that the spill had contaminated the groundwater in Parachute with Benzene to levels as high as 36,000 times greater than safe levels for drinking water. (8)(20)(34)(41)(56)
- (March) Williams/Transco rejected U.S. Army Corp of Engineers safety recommendations in connection with the proposed Rockaway Lateral natural gas pipeline, claiming the requirements would "needlessly delay" the project and force cost overruns. (7)
- (March 23) A Williams 24-inch gathering pipeline ruptured in Marshal County, West Virginia. (30)(56)(59)(60)
- (April) Parachute, Colorado residents question credibility of Williams tests of their water and request that the government conduct testing instead. Contamination continued to spread into the creek. (8)(42)
- (April) Williams stated faulty pressure gauge caused leak in Parachute. Diesel was found at the gates of the Parachute water supply and Benzene was detected in the creek. The State Health Department took over oversight of the leak. (8)(9)
- (May) Benzene levels were measured to have risen higher in Parachute, Colorado creek. State agency told Williams that it violated the law. (8)
- (May) A fire in the Williams compressor station at Branchburg, New Jersey injured 13 people. (56)
- Williams announced it would not proceed with the planned Parachute, Colorado plant expansion. The reason provided was low gas prices, rather than the NGL leak. (8)
- (May 15) Pennsylvania Department of Protection (DEP) suggested bulging walls discovered after a fire in Williams Central Compressor Station near Montrose, Pennsylvania were evidence that an explosion had also occurred. Williams denied the allegation. (56)(59)
- (May 21) Williams held Analyst Day in New York City. CEO Alan Armstrong stated the company has been working on the Bluegrass pipeline project for 9-10 months. Williams stated Bluegrass Pipeline is big and risky in terms of permitting. (45)
- (June 13) Williams' Natural Gas Liquid (NGL) cracker (chemical) plant that processes NGLs in Geismar, Louisiana exploded and burned. The plant was in the middle of a \$350 million expansion. Seven hundred contract workers were present. Two people were killed and 114 were injured. From 31,000 - 62,000 pounds of toxic chemical were released. (1)(4)(5)(6)(39)(56)
- (June 14) Investigations into Williams' Louisiana explosion found three years of noncompliance with Federal Clean Air Act. It was discovered that Williams had not conducted an OSHA inspection in ten years. (4)(14)(56)
- (July 10) Williams (Bargath) was fined \$7,854 by OSHA for failing to protect workers they sent to excavate toxic soil near the Williams' Parachute, Colorado that leaked Benzene. The OSHA report stated that Williams did not have a decontamination procedure nor did it ensure its employees received safety training related to the spill. Williams stated it did not agree to or accept OSHA's allegations. (49)
- (July 13) Benzene levels were found to have increased in the Parachute, Colorado leak. One hundred thirty tons per day of contaminated soil were stockpiled. (3)
- (July 20) Report showed that Williams expected to remove and treat as many as 26 million gallons of groundwater over 12-18 months at the site of its natural gas liquids leak on Parachute Creek. About 155,000 gallons of tainted groundwater removed in March had been disposed of in an injection well in Grand County, Utah. (52)(56)
- Discussion of concerns about a proposed Williams Bluegrass Pipeline in Kentucky noted that federal regulators had fined applicants Williams and Boardwalk Pipeline Partners

L.P. nearly \$2.4 million over the previous five years for 18 incidents reflecting failure to monitor corrosion and delaying repairs to natural gas pipelines evidencing metal loss. (53)

- (December) The Pipeline Safety Trust analyzed safety and compliance records of companies regulated by the Pipeline Safety Administration and found that from 2006-2011, federal agencies had launched more enforcement actions against Williams (21) than all but three other companies and that only one other company had a higher total of proposed penalties than the \$1.6 million against Williams. (53)
- (December) The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration proposed a \$99,000 fine for six safety violations at the Williams' Geismar, Louisiana natural gas plant. Williams CEO Alan Armstrong reportedly stated in response that Williams has an overall "very good" safety record. (54)

## **2014**

- (January) A fire at Williams' Windsor, New York compressor station was the second in less than two years. (56)
- (March 11) Repeated equipment failures at a gas transfer station on Sauvie Island serving Portland, Oregon caused several evacuations. Gas releases went on for two months before the company notified residents. Residents complained that federal regulators failed to investigate until they brought political and media pressure. (57)(58)
- (March 31) A Williams Company liquefied gas storage site in Plymouth, Washington exploded. The incident injured five workers and prompted the evacuation of hundreds of residents and employees. (54)(56)(57)
- (April) A pipeline supplying a Williams company facility in Moundsville, West Virginia exploded and caused a fire. (56)
- (April 23) An explosion and fire at Williams natural gas plant forced the evacuation of all residents of Opal, Wyoming. (54)(56)(57)
- (May) The U.S. Chemical Safety Board expanded its investigation of safety practices at Williams Companies after the incidents in Washington, Wyoming, and Louisiana. The lead investigator for the Board said, "With a strong corporate oversight of process safety, it would be very unlikely to have three incidents like this in a 12-month period." (54)
- (June) A blast at a Louisiana chemical plant owned by Williams killed two workers and injured 80. (54)

## **2015**

- (April 14) Heavy rains in Marshall County, West Virginia cause mud to shift and rupture two Williams pipelines. Nearby Little Grave Creek was contaminated by condensate and five families were evacuated. The following day the Department of Environmental Protection fined Williams for the leak. (61)(62)
- (April 28) After two weeks of looking, Williams finally located the source of the condensate leak. Over 5,500 gallons of condensate leaked during the first few days. (63)
- (October) Three deaths and two burn injuries resulted from a natural gas plant explosion at the Williams-owned plant in Gibson, Louisiana. (55)
- (October 25) A state-designated inspector found 10 erosion and sedimentation control violations by Williams workers during two recent inspections of the Rock Springs gas pipeline being built across 10 miles in southern Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. This followed a rain storm that dumped more than 3 inches in the area over five days in late September and early October. (64)

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