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City of Duluth Communications Office

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SUBJECT: City of Duluth, MnDOT, and Ames/Kraemer Joint Venture provide details to gas line incident

BY: Kate Van Daele, Public Information Officer

City of Duluth, MnDOT, and Ames/Kraemer Joint Venture provide details to gas line incident

[Duluth, MN] The City of Duluth, Ames/Kraemer Joint Venture, and the Minnesota Department of Transportation worked collaboratively and with the intent to not disrupt natural gas customer service after one of MnDOT's contractors hit a gas line last Thursday, January 27. The following is a sequence of events and actions taken by the three entities.

At 11:25 a.m. on Thursday, January 27, the contractor notified the City immediately upon hitting the City's largest gas main, near the rail yard by 19th Avenue West and Michigan Street. The contractor called 911, and the Duluth Fire Department and City Public Works and Utilities dispatched crews to the scene to evaluate. At 12:05 p.m. City staff confirmed that the line had been hit, and work began to shut down the line. The Minnesota Department of Transportation and the Minnesota Office of Pipeline Safety were notified of the hit.

Throughout the afternoon and evening, City Crews worked to isolate the area and depressurize the gas main. Crews remained on site until 1:00 a.m. addressing the problem.

The City of Duluth issued a press release before 9:00 p.m. on January 27, informing residents of the incident. City staff monitored the flow of gas and pressures in the remaining lines overnight.

"We closed the valves for this section of pipe as fast as possible," City Chief Engineer Eric Shaffer said. "We turned the main off for a ten-block stretch. We then depressurized the main which was a slow process. The City, Ames/Kraemer Joint Venture crews, and MnDOT staff worked together from the beginning in identifying how to repair the damage. Ames/Kraemer staff called 911 to dispatch emergency personnel immediately after the hit. Ames/Kraemer Joint Venture also provided excavation help using their larger equipment. This joint effort allowed crews to excavate and reach the line faster to begin the repair work. This was a team effort from start to finish."

By 6:50 a.m. on Friday, January 28, the City of Duluth issued a press release asking Lakeside and Woodland natural gas customers to reduce their thermostats to 62 degrees. This request was targeted to Lakeside and Woodland because they are the largest neighborhoods within the area where the gas supply was reduced. By reducing the heating load in these areas, the load on the overall gas system was reduced. Large gas users called the City during the morning and offered their assistance in using alternative heating sources to help reduce the load.

At noon, the City issued a press release extending the requests to all natural gas users east of Lake Avenue to lower their thermostats to 62 degrees until further notice. In a press release, the City said, "Making this change will help the City reduce the overall load on the system and avoid the possibility of a neighborhood-by-neighborhood shutdown of gas." This effort helped not to overburden the system while crews continued to repair the gas main and track flow and pressure throughout the rest of the City.

Just before 3:00 p.m., crews started to dig a second excavation point to begin draining the pipe of water. By 5:00 p.m., crews had been able to dewater the excavation successfully. Work then began to remove the steel casing from around the pipe to allow for installations of repair clamps to fix the break. Just before 11:00 p.m. crews finished the repair clamp installation and welding of purging equipment.

The City issued another update to residents just before 7:00 p.m., asking all natural gas residents east of Lake Avenue to maintain 62 degrees until further notice. The City said in its release, "The reason for this request is to keep the heat on for all residents, instead of shutting off heat to specific areas. These efforts are helping, are keeping our system from being overburdened. Crews have been working to fix this gas main under difficult conditions, and that work is progressing."

On Saturday, January 29, the City issued a press release asking natural gas customers east of Lake Avenue to maintain a 62-degree setting through the weekend. This decision was made after crews reported work to begin purging the line of remaining water left in the system. Shortly after 11:15 a.m., the City put out a statement saying that there was a smell of gas in the Lincoln Park area because of the purging of the line. There was no threat to the public, and the smell was a natural consequence of the repair process.

Crews worked all day to purge the line and discharge water. By 1:30 p.m., the gas line was closed, allowing gas to be reintroduced to the line, and was full of pressure. After that, crews began inspecting the line for leaks. At 2:00 p.m., the line

was turned on to evaluate pressure at Garfield Avenue and the Canal Park regulator station. The line was fully opened at this point. This provided high pressure service back to the Steam Plant, Canal Park, Park Point and Garfield Avenue. City staff continued to monitor the flow and pressure throughout the day and night.

On Sunday, January 30, crews were able to open a valve to feed gas from the area to the rest of the system by 9:00 a.m. City staff monitored the flow and pressure of gas in the line before deciding at 11:00 a.m. to lift the natural gas limitation to customers. At noon, the City of Duluth issued a press release, lifting the thermostat request for natural gas customers east of Lake Avenue. Mayor Emily Larson and Interim Director of Public Works & Utilities Greg Guerrero held a press conference thanking staff and residents for their assistance during the incident.

"This was an extensive project with crews working simultaneously throughout the area," Shaffer said. "Our staff and the crews from Ames/Kraemer Joint Venture and MnDOT worked in partnership to access the pipe quickly to make the repairs needed and to monitor the flow and pressure of gas throughout the incident. We greatly appreciated the support of our partners and their assistance throughout this incident."

"Ames/Kraemer would like to thank the City of Duluth and MnDOT personnel for their quick response to this incident," said Stephen Kaldenbach, Vice President - Area Manager MN, Ames/Kraemer Joint Venture. "It was a team effort working together make the necessary repairs and restore gas service. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the City of Duluth and MnDOT on the Twin Ports Interchange Project."

"MnDOT is working with our project partners, the City of Duluth and Ames-Kraemer Joint Venture to improve processes on the Twin Ports Interchange project," said Pat Huston, MnDOT Assistant District Engineer of Major Project. "We are working collaboratively to implement changes that will reduce the risk of future errors."

While the gas main was fixed temporarily, City staff are confident that they have repaired the line until it can be permanently fixed. A permanent fix will take place soon after the ground thaws. It will depend on the ground and weather conditions to determine how long it will take to make the repair.

The investigation into this matter continues. No additional information is available at this time.

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