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Argus Observer

Are Payette County residents safe near gas facilities?

State finds Highway 30 plant out of compliance

- By Corey Evan Special to the Independent-Enterprise
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This photo from April of 2019 shows oil and gas facilities off Little Willow Road. During a recent inspection conducted by James Thum of the Idaho Department of Lands' Boise office, multiple issues of concern were identified for correction by the facility's owners, Snake River Oil and Gas.

PAYETTE COUNTY — Leaders of the nonprofit Citizens Allied for Integrity and Accountability are turning their attention back toward the Highway 30 Gas Processing Facility south of New Plymouth, after a state official raised concerns about its operations. During an inspection conducted by James Thum of the Idaho Department of Lands' Boise office, multiple issues of concern were identified for correction by the facility's owners, Snake River Oil and Gas.

The report was brought to the newspaper's attention in a news release on Oct. 29 by Shelley Brock, president of Citizens Allied.

“Surprisingly, shortly after media reports of CAIA’s complaint surfaced, public records show that IDL conducted a prompt inspection of the H30 plant in question and documented for the first time in the agency’s posted history that the facility was ‘out of compliance’ due to hazardous emissions leaking from multiple sources,” wrote Brock.

Following are examples of concerns identified during the inspection.

- “Portable spill containment device is breached (cut) on the east side approximately 14 inches along side and bottom.” The report notes that seven of eight tanks at the facility were tagged with white greenhouse gas tags by Team Industrial Services, Inc. on Sept. 12 and Sept. 13, and includes photos of this breach.
- Excessive vegetation was identified on the west side of the facility, from the pig launcher/catchers south to the facility’s flare stack.

“Weed abatement needed in the vicinity of the storage tanks, in and outside of the containment berm,” wrote Thum in the report.

- Atop the storage tank battery, he observed a fugitive emissions tag dated March 12, 2023.

- Thum observed and photographed plastic 5-gallon buckets are being used for lubrication spill containment at a condensate stabilizer unit.
- He also noted a tear in a portable spill containment device used for chemical storage south of the facility's pig launcher/catcher.

The concerns identified by the department are only the latest challenges facing Snake River Oil.

A notice of violation issued on May 20, 2020 was submitted to the newspaper by Brock on Oct. 30. It is signed by Acting Director Lauris Davies of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency — Region 10, and notifies Richard Brown and Chris Weiser that Snake River Oil and Gas was potentially in violation of some permits issued through the Idaho State Implementation Plan. It also cited potential violations of “the Standards of Performance for Crude Oil and Natural Gas Production, Transmission and Distribution for which Construction, Modification or Reconstruction Commenced After Aug. 23, 2011, found in 40 C.F.R. Part 60, Subpart OOOO, as well as the Standards of Performance for Crude Oil and Natural Gas Facilities for which Construction, Modification or Reconstruction Commenced After September 18, 2015, Subpart OOOOa” according to the document.

“The records show that EPA had collected their own ... evidence which, clear back in 2018, had uncovered countless, serious violations of multiple regulatory laws that have allowed dangerous emissions to spew uninterrupted from both of the facilities in question for at least half a decade now,” wrote Brock in the release.

In May, gas imaging thermographer Andrew Klooster of Denver, Colorado based nonprofit Earthworks conducted a survey of the Little Willow Road and Highway 30 gas facilities, and said his findings raised serious concerns about leakage of pollutants into the atmosphere.

In a statement to the newspaper on Nov. 3, Brown stated, “A handful of items were noted, and they have all been addressed. One had already been identified by our compliance consultant and we were working on it by the time the inspection took place. We expect IDL will reinspect and sign off on our work in the near future. We are always looking to ensure that all proper protocol is followed and we work closely with the IDL to follow all proper procedure and respond to anything that needs addressed.”

As noted in the inspection report, the facility is no longer manned 24 hours daily, as officials with Snake River Oil and Gas relocated its field office to 112 N. Plymouth Ave., New Plymouth.

Read for yourself

The report from the Sept. 22 Idaho Department of Lands inspection can be viewed online at <https://bit.ly/3sAfMJb>.

What's that?

A “pig launcher” is a device which uses a pressurized container to shoot a cleaning device (“pig”) through a pipeline to perform a variety of functions including cleaning, monitoring and maintaining of the pipe, according to Piping Technology & Products.