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Crosstex Butane Cavern Shows Little-to-no Threat to Slurry Hole Area

BATON ROUGE - The departments of Environmental Quality and Natural Resources have reviewed Crosstex Entergy Services' updated risk management plan for its storage cavern in Assumption Parish. Both agencies agree with Crosstex's calculations that the cavern poses little-to-no threat to the population near where a slurry hole appeared in early August.

On Wednesday, at DEQ's request, Crosstex Energy Services re-evaluated their worst case scenario analysis. Their initial analysis was based on the concept of a failure of the pipeline at the surface. Based on that analysis, the impact radius calculated was broken windows at 0.3 miles. It was noted that the quantity of butane was doubled for this calculation in order to be more protective of human health. At the state's request, Crosstex modified their worst-case scenario to consider that their butane-filled cavern was akin to an underground storage tank and calculations should be based on any failure of that system.

An important factor to understand is that the butane in this cavern is stored more than a half-mile below ground surface. At this depth and pressure, the butane is a liquid. The only way to get it to the surface is to pump salt water, which is heavier than butane, into the cavern in order to displace the butane to the surface. A failure of the cavern or piping would not cause this material to free-flow upward to the surface.

Concerns have been expressed regarding the possibility of the sink hole somehow expanding into the cavern holding the butane. It should be noted that the cavern containing the butane liquid is more than a half-mile underground and deep in the stable salt dome. The sink hole, at the deepest depth known to this point, is 300 feet.

While it is easy to simply convert the known quantity of butane into a blast scenario, that does not mean this scenario is possible. A blast scenario of the liquid butane stored at the pressure and depth at which it is stored in the absence of oxygen is not possible. If the piping failed, some vapors could come to the top of the well head. If there was an ignition source, there could be slow burn at the wellhead. Lacking pressure or some other driving force to push it rapidly to the surface, it would not be expected to create a violent reaction such as an explosion. If the salt dome were to fracture and cause the casing for the storage of the liquid butane to crack, the liquid butane would flow into the cracks of the salt dome and not come to the surface. To see Crosstex's letter explaining the calculations and the worst case scenario, go to www.deq.louisiana.gov.

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