



Attachment F
Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission
Pipeline Safety Division
Focus Group Report

Methodology

The Evans/McDonough Company, on behalf of The Frause Group team, conducted two focus groups for the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (WUTC) on December 17, 2003 among residents who reside within a quarter mile of a major pipeline. The topic was public awareness of pipeline safety initiatives. One group consisted of residents who were aware they lived near a major pipeline, and the second was among those who were unaware. Participants were selected based on their awareness of the pipeline and quotas were set to ensure the groups matched the demographic breakdown of the telephone survey conducted in August 2003.

Participants were paid an incentive of \$50.00 and were provided refreshments. The focus groups were video taped, with original recordings stored at the offices of Evans/McDonough. Copies were made available to the WUTC and The Frause Group. Use of the videotapes is limited to research analysis and presentation.

Focus groups are, by design, qualitative research and are not a substitute for quantitative research. Focus groups permit the observation of participants' thinking process, language, and reactions to various themes, messages, and strategies. The results of these groups provide insight into attitudes and behaviors of residents who live near pipelines, but cannot be projected to the overall population of pipeline residents.

The purpose of these groups was to conduct a deeper investigation of some of the issues raised by the telephone poll. More specifically, the groups were designed to further illuminate what residents want to know about the pipelines they live with, how they want to receive the information, and from whom the

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information would best be distributed. They were also designed to better understand how residents would react to the messages and communication plan developed for the WUTC.

Highlights

Most participants in both groups feel things in the region are heading in the wrong direction and that traffic/transportation and growth are the most important problems.

This sentiment is consistent with other research conducted in the region. Other problems seen as most important among participants are the cost of living and unemployment.

When choosing a place to live, four out of ten in the “aware” group gave pipelines a five (major concern), and only two gave a similar rating in the “unaware” group.

A bigger concern for those with children is living on or near a busy street. These participants have much more concern over the negative impacts that are associated with living on or near a busy street than they do with the pipelines in their backyards. In fact, most state that they feel safer with their kids playing near the pipeline than near a busy street. Other concerns placed above pipelines are living near an airport and in an area with potential for flood or landslide damage.

Most participants in both groups are comfortable (or would be comfortable) living near a pipeline.

Most see pipelines as an essential element to our region’s energy supply, and prefer pipelines to other methods of fuel transport such as ships and trucks. This is consistent with the findings of the telephone survey. For most of the aware participants the pipeline is considered to be unobtrusive, and if anything, a barrier towards future development around their property. Each of the aware participants lives within a thousand feet of the pipeline, and thus, has some form of interaction with it on a daily basis. This interaction comes in the form of either visual sight from the home or use of the

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path used by pipeline companies to inspect and maintain the pipelines. A few of the aware participants say they feel perfectly safe walking along the path on a daily basis.

Of the ten aware participants, four knew about the pipeline before they moved in and the rest learned of the pipeline afterwards. A total of six participants say they would still move onto a property with a pipeline if they had the choice to start all over again. Those who say they would not move onto a property with a pipeline were not particularly vocal about their reasons, but some suggest that the disaster in Bellingham has much to do with their concerns.

As expected, the unaware participants are a bit more ambivalent. However, for most of the participants in this group, there is little concern over pipelines in their minds.

All but one of the aware participants say they do not receive enough information about the pipelines near their property/homes.

The aware participants want to receive more information about the pipelines. Some general suggestions participants give are that the information needs to be simple, local, and should come from a partnership of sources. For the unaware group, where there is less of a need for information, participants want the information to be readily available if they wish to obtain it. *This is the defining difference between the two groups.*

Some say that there was an increase in the amount of information sent to them following the Bellingham accident, most of which came from Olympic Pipeline on what seemed to be a random basis. However, some of the participants do not recall ever receiving information about the pipeline in their backyard.

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In general, aware participants want to receive basic information about pipelines, and unaware participants want basic information to be available should they need or want it.

The most requested pieces of information among aware participants are the rights of property owners, plans for new pipelines or expansion, the pipeline company's safety record, and the testing and maintenance schedule. Neither the aware nor the unaware are familiar with any emergency or evacuation plans regarding pipelines. However, most participants say common sense is the best plan, as everyone would simply call 9-1-1 in the event of an emergency; and if the emergency was severe, both aware and unaware say they would flee the area as fast as possible (in both groups this was referenced as the "run like hell" plan). Common sense also seemed to dictate how to detect if something is wrong with the pipeline, such as the scent of gas in the air, the sight of liquid coming from the pipeline, or the foreign sounds (such as a "hissing sound").

Door-to-door canvassing and direct mail are by far the most popular forms of communication among participants in both groups.

Almost every participant espouses direct mail, especially if the piece is included in a utility bill. Some of the participants who are more technologically savvy prefer email or an Internet Web site they can reference upon need, but most say they would pay attention to a notice that was included in their mail. Door-to-door canvassing is also seen as an effective way to convey pipeline safety messages. Participants like the idea of a credible person coming to their door to share this important information, and see this as the best way to enlist the attention of residents. This would also give residents a chance to ask unanswered questions.

Television and radio news, newspapers, and public forums are not seen as effective modes of communication. Participants say that it is unlikely people would pay attention to a macro level communication strategy. They suggest keeping the methods as personal as possible, hence the popularity of door-to-door canvassing and direct mail. There was also support for an 800 number, which would allow residents to call for information upon need and convenience.

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Local fire and police are trusted the most among the participants, but are not seen as experts in the area of pipelines.

The survey conducted in August showed that nearly every resident trusts his or her local fire and police department. However, what the focus groups uncovered that the survey did not was that although there is a high level of trust, local fire and police are not seen as experts on pipelines. Pipeline companies, on the other hand, are seen as experts, but suffer from a lack of trust among the focus group participants (and phone survey respondents). Only two of the participants in the unaware group and five in the aware trust the pipeline companies to give information about pipelines that is accurate and reliable. However, participants in both groups see the combination between the pipeline companies and local fire/police as a very effective partnership. The information comes from the experts but is communicated from the most trusted source.

The WUTC and the OPS are also seen as a trusted source, but most of the participants feel strongly about the partnership between the companies and the local fire/police. Citizens groups, however, are unpopular as most participants feel they do not have enough experience or knowledge about pipelines to provide reliable information.

The color scheme communications metaphor received positive feedback from both groups, and is generally seen as a simple and effective way to convey basic pipeline safety messages.

There is a general consensus that the color schemes should provide the following information:

Green: Basic pipeline safety information. This level should have a simple tagline, such as “Basic Pipeline Safety”.

Yellow: Basic operational and maintenance information; how to detect if something is wrong with the pipeline; map and route of the pipeline; and how to contact people if questions arise. The tagline adopted for this level was “Your Pipeline: What you need to know”.

Red: Evacuation plans and local contact numbers in case of a pipeline emergency. The tagline adopted for this level was “Pipeline Safety Basics” and “Pipeline Emergency Basics”.

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In the aware group the three words that are most popular are “Basics,” “Information,” and “Safety.” The unaware group is a bit more ambivalent, but prefers “Pipeline Smart” and “Pipeline Safe Washington”. Some other suggestions from both groups is to be honest about the pipeline and discuss how it can benefit the community, rather than just focusing on pipelines as a potential hazard. Nearly all participants understand that pipelines have to go somewhere and that they are a part of our lifestyle.