

TC Energy Virginia Pipeline Explosion a “Red Flag” Warning to FERC to Deny TC Energy’s GTN Xpress Proposal

Summary:

- On July 25, 2023, a high-pressure gas pipeline owned and operated by TC Energy exploded in Strasburg, Virginia. Additionally, TC Energy owns the Keystone Pipeline, which ruptured and leaked 588,000 gallons of oil in December 2022.
- At the same time, TC Energy is proposing a controversial expansion project in Idaho, Washington, and Oregon called GTN Xpress that would increase compression on its GTN pipeline system, which is significantly larger than the pipeline that exploded in Virginia.
- **These incidents are major “red flags,” underscoring TC Energy’s poor safety track record. Dozens of community organizations have called on FERC to deny GTN Xpress or delay FERC’s decision until further study of safety issues in TC Energy’s pipeline systems, including in Virginia and the Northwest.**

Details:

- The pipeline failure in Virginia was a dramatic event ([video here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#)). You can read an initial report from PHMSA, a part of U.S. DOT that regulates pipelines, here: [https://www.phmsa.dot.gov/sites/phmsa.dot.gov/files/2023-07/Columbia%20Gas%20Transmission CAO 12023051 07282023.pdf](https://www.phmsa.dot.gov/sites/phmsa.dot.gov/files/2023-07/Columbia%20Gas%20Transmission%20CAO%2012023051%2007282023.pdf)
- According to PHMSA, the pipeline rupture caused a fire that burned for hours, closed an interstate, and *ejected 250 feet of pipe from the ground*. TC Energy is not required to submit a root cause analysis for the failure until late October, 2023.
- The TC Energy Line VB Virginia pipeline failure was in a decades-old pipeline [constructed in 1950](#), likely caused by “environmental cracking.” In a disturbing parallel, TC Energy’s GTN Xpress proposal involves increasing gas flows in TC Energy’s Gas Transmission Northwest (GTN) pipeline system, parts of which are decades old. The compressor TC Energy proposes to expand in Starbuck, WA, was constructed in 1961, for instance.
- [TC Energy was responsible for a major pipeline failure in its Keystone pipeline in December 2022](#), causing the release of 588,000 gallons of oil into a Kansas waterway. The cause was a crack in the pipeline, which was much newer than the GTN system.
- If an accident similar to the Virginia pipeline explosion and fire were to occur on the GTN pipeline system, the results could be catastrophic. The GTN pipeline system passes

directly through an area that has repeatedly been [under “red flag” warnings for fire danger](#), tinder dry and windy areas. In August 2022, the States of Washington, Oregon, and California [argued that FERC “ignores the realities of the arid West](#), where wildland fire threatens the rangelands and sagebrush steppe ecosystem that surround the Starbuck and Kent Compressor Stations.”

- By increasing the amount of gas flowing through the system, TC Energy would be increasing the risks associated with a pipeline failure, according to the Pipeline Safety Trust. There are [increased risks from pipelines with increased compression](#). The pipeline that ruptured in Virginia was 26 inches, operating just under 800 psi. The GTN pipeline system includes a 42-inch pipe. Operating at the same pressure, the hazard radius from a failure of the 42-inch GTN pipe could be hundreds of feet larger.

Communities Objecting, Having an Impact

Immediately after the Virginia explosion, [26 organizations from Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Virginia demanded that FERC deny GTN Xpress or delay its decision on the project](#).

The Pipeline Safety Trust [also renewed its request that FERC](#) not approve the GTN Xpress pipeline. Senators Merkley and Wyden from Oregon [also urged FERC to deny GTN Xpress](#), as reported by [E&E News](#).

Shortly following these letters, FERC withdrew GTN Xpress from its July 27, 2023 agenda.

Possible Interview Opportunities:

- Audrey Leonard, Staff Attorney of Columbia Riverkeeper, and member of the Stop GTN Xpress Coalition - audrey@columbiariverkeeper.org 541.399.4775
- Jessica Sims, Appalachian Voices, Virginia, jessica@appvoices.org
- *If they want to speak to someone close to the line, Satya Austin-Opper, Campaign Coordinator for 350 Deschutes, can attest to the fact that the GTN pipeline system passes through planned communities near Bend, OR. Phone: 828.575.8228 (best if they speak to Audrey first). saopper@350deschutes.org*

Documents:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1iIAqYM2dIXCjDg66fG62T-ug-Y39PymQ?usp=drive_link

Images of protest:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1WPgeQvclGf_fJo4Sq1HigG46zYERltuy?usp=sharing

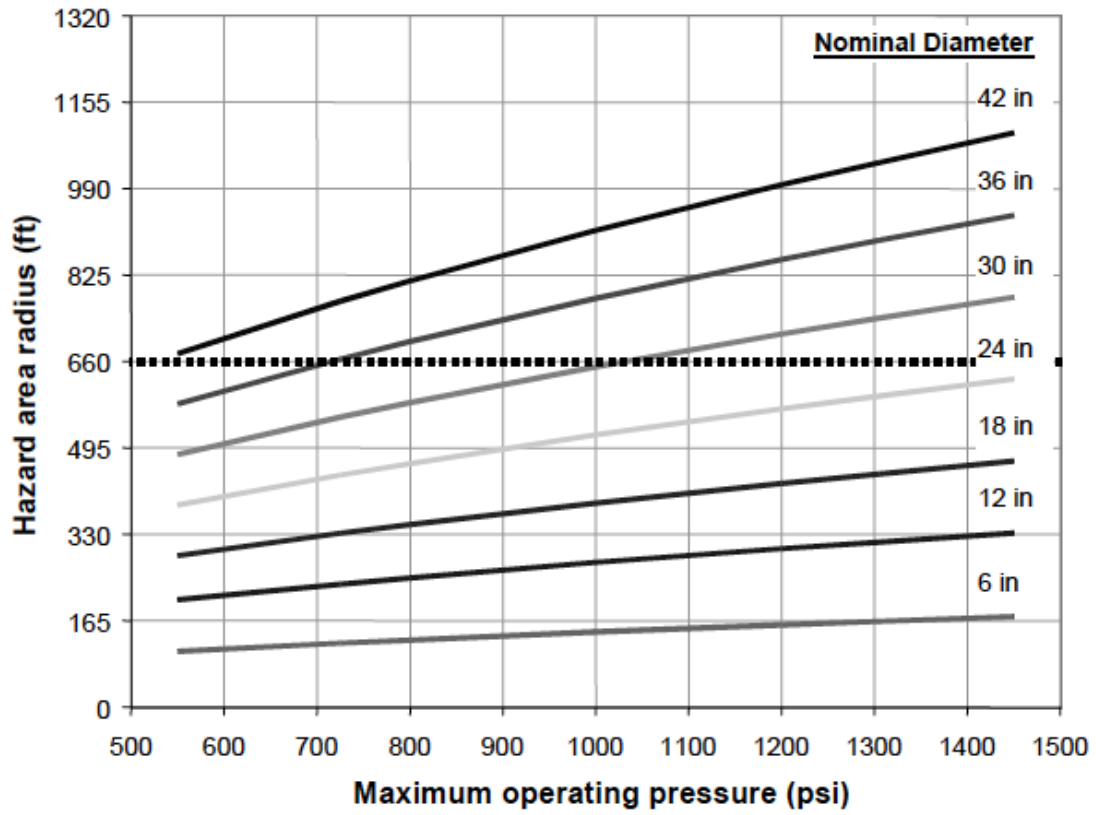


Figure 2.4 Proposed hazard area radius as a function of line diameter and pressure.