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Construction mishap worries landowners

Wed, 04/08/2020 - 9:52am

Water wells soiled in Blanco County; construction on hold there

BY: SAMUEL SUTTON

At least two Blanco area residents have experienced discolored water after a drilling incident sent thousands of gallons of bentonite clay and sand into the wells.

On Saturday, March 28, an “underground drilling fluid loss” occurred during construction of the Permian Highway Pipeline, said Katherine Hill, senior corporate communications specialist with Kinder Morgan, in a statement.

The pipeline is a 42-inch, 430-mile-long natural gas line going through the Texas Hill Country.

Impacted Blanco residents told the Austin-American Statesman that their water turned a “chocolate brown.”

Several locals contacted the Fredericksburg Standard-Radio Post, voicing concerns about the pipeline construction.

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Dirk Jordan, who owns a ranch on Schumann Road in Albert, roughly a quarter-mile from pipeline construction, said his concerns “were validated” by this incident.

Jordan is planning to plant grapes and fruit trees at his ranch, but fears that a potential drilling mishap in Albert would contaminate the water he would use for those plants.

“Here in Albert, we’re on Karst lines, too, so we’d experience the same thing people in Blanco County did,” he said.

Jordan said he, and likely many others, have “a trust issue” with the pipeline company about how they’re conducting business.

“I would ask if they can guarantee my water quality won’t be interfered with,” Jordan said. “You don’t have the right to take away my water.”

Hill said in the statement that the bentonite clay is a naturally occurring, non-toxic clay.

“The drilling is not classified as being harmful if ingested and poses no known risk to drinking water,” Hill said.

U.S. Rep. Chip Roy voiced his concerns about an incident in a letter to Allen Fore, Kinder Morgan’s vice president of public affairs.

“Access to a clean water supply is one of the most critical aspects of life for my constituents, whether they live in an urban area, drawing from the Edwards Aquifer, or a simple water well located on their property,” Roy wrote. “Water is quite literally the lifeblood of the Texas Hill Country. Any negligent activity that threatens or endangers this critical resource is unacceptable.”

Roy asked how the incident happened, what has been done to mitigate the damage to the water supply, what KM is doing to rehabilitate the issue and what steps are being taken to prevent this in the future.

Hill stated the company has suspended drilling operations at the Blanco Horizontal Directional Drill site while it evaluates the cause of the loss and determines the best path forward.

The company stated they are also working with affected landowners to address their needs, and with its Karst expert and local water district manager to determine how to mitigate the impact.

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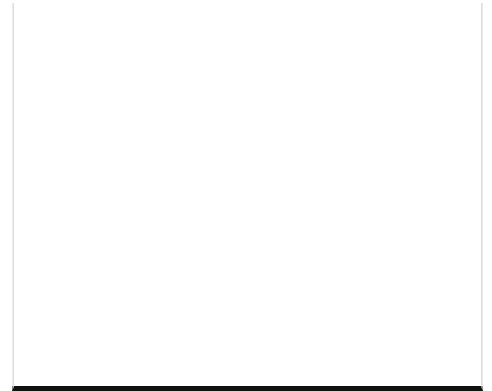
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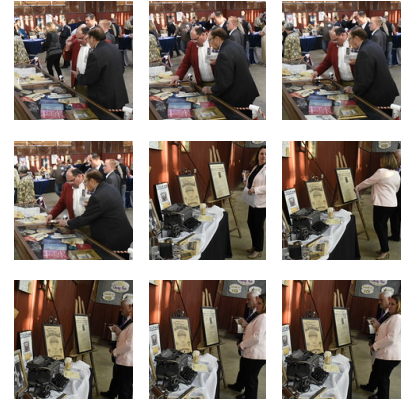
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