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NORTH CAROLINA UTILITIES COMMISSION

PRESS RELEASE

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NORTH CAROLINA UTILITIES COMMISSION – PIPELINE SAFETY SECTION PUBLISHES REPORT ON THE INVESTIGATION OF THE APRIL 2019 NATURAL GAS PIPELINE INCIDENT IN DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA

Raleigh, NC – Today the North Carolina Utilities Commission – Pipeline Safety Section published its report on the natural gas incident that occurred on April 10, 2019, at 115 N. Duke Street in Durham, North Carolina.

The Pipeline Safety Section investigated this incident pursuant to the authority granted to the Commission by North Carolina General Statutes Section 62-50(b), cooperated with state and federal agencies in this investigation, and has compiled a report on the incident. The report is available on the Commission's website (www.ncuc.net) and includes the findings and background materials reviewed during the investigation.

As further detailed in the report, the Pipeline Safety Section personnel reached the following findings based upon the information obtained during the investigation:

- PSNC Energy (PSNC) appropriately responded to the incident and cooperated with the Pipeline Safety Section's investigation, including reporting as required by 49 C.F.R. § 191.9 and Commission Rule R6-41(b);

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- PSNC’s underground facilities, including the service line, were accurately located and marked by PSNC’s contractor, Southern Cross, Inc., in accordance with N.C.G.S. § 87-121, prior to the initiation of drilling activities;
- The probable cause of the incident was the breach of a natural gas facility by a horizontal-directional drilling, or “boring,” device that was being used for the purpose of installing fiber optic cable. The breach allowed natural gas to migrate to the interior of the building located at 115 N. Duke Street, where it was ignited resulting in an explosion;
- The operator of the boring device failed to comply with the requirements of N.C.G.S. § 87-122(c)(9) in the operation of the boring device: (1) by using mechanized equipment within the tolerance zone of the natural gas facility; and (2) by failing to identify visually the precise location of the natural gas facility prior to using mechanized equipment; and
- The operator of the boring device failed to comply with the requirements of N.C.G.S. § 87-126 by failing to immediately report the damage to the natural gas facility to the notification center (NC 811, Inc.), emergency services (911), and PSNC.

The Pipeline Safety Section’s investigation and reporting authority pursuant to N.C.G.S. § 62-50(b) is limited to matters related to pipeline safety regulations. Therefore, the report does not address civil or criminal wrongdoing, nor does it address compliance with laws or regulations implemented or enforced by other governmental agencies.

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