U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

NEWS RELEASE

US DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR ■ BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
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No Pipeline Weld Defects Found

Longitudinal Seam Testing Results Reveal No Weld Defects

ALBUQUERQUE, NM–The Albuquerque Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) announces the completion of the New Mexico Products Pipeline (NMPP) Longitudinal Seam Testing Program. The analysis exposed no seam-weld defects and these findings strengthen the BLM's confidence in the integrity of the pipeline.

As part of the NMPP Environmental Impact Statement, the BLM requested a structural integrity report on the existing 406-mile long section of pipe included in the proposed NMPP project. This section of pipeline was manufactured in the late 1950s using a long-seam welding procedure called electric-resistance welding (ERW). Historically, ERW pipe could have been affected by a variety of variables at the time of production and can cause integrity concerns. So, it is imperative to determine if ERW pipe, comprising 80% of the proposed NMPP, has sufficient structural integrity for the transport of the proposed products.

In all cases of ERW production flaws, a pre-service hydrostatic test would usually expose the largest welding defects. However, even though hydrostatic testing is capable of detecting large welding defects, some defects may remain and grow during pipeline service. A full-scale ERW seam-weld integrity plan, which could detect such defects, would be costly but necessary if the pipeline is susceptible to seam-weld time-dependant deterioration. The Longitudinal Seam Testing Program, a seam-weld integrity analysis, was conducted in order to provide a tool to assess the need for more a more extensive analysis.

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Upon request of the BLM, the Shell Pipeline Company conducted a limited nondestructive evaluation of the ERW long seam pipe in the proposed NMPP. Shell subcontracted the seam inspection to IRISNDT, Inc. from Tulsa, Oklahoma. Between April 28, 2002 and May 13, 2002, the Longitudinal Seam Testing Program analyzed 30 sites, agreed upon by the BLM, along the existing pipeline. Testing showed no indication of crack-like defects in the long-seam welds. The results from this testing suggest that seam-weld defects do not appear to be a significant factor for the integrity of the NMPP.

In addition to long-seam testing requested by the BLM, Shell has conducted a burst test on pipe samples and plans to conduct a pre-service hydrostatic test for the NMPP. The testing history of this pipeline notes only one previous hydrostatic test, occurring in 1958. Records show that this test did not expose any defects. The findings from this historical test the Longitudinal Seam Testing Program, and the positive results of the burst test all provide greater confidence that Shell's planned pre-service hydrostatic test will not expose any defects. However, if this hydrotest does expose defects, a more extensive seam-weld integrity plan will be developed.

A copy of the Longitudinal Seam Testing Report is available to the public upon request. For a copy of the report, please contact Joe Jaramillo, BLM Project Manager, at (505) 761-8779.

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