

STATE OF MICHIGAN  
BEFORE THE MICHIGAN PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

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In the matter, on the Commission's own motion,	)	
to commence an investigation into a January 30,	)	
2019 fire at <b>CONSUMERS ENERGY COMPANY's</b>	)	Case No. U-20463
Ray Compressor Station in Macomb County.	)	
_____	)	

At the May 8, 2020 meeting of the Michigan Public Service Commission in Lansing,  
Michigan.

PRESENT: Hon. Sally A. Talberg, Chairman  
Hon. Daniel C. Scripps, Commissioner  
Hon. Tremaine L. Phillips, Commissioner

**ORDER**

History of Proceedings

At approximately 10:30 a.m. on January 30, 2019, a fire occurred at Consumers Energy Company's (Consumers') Ray Natural Gas Compressor Station in Macomb County (the Ray facility). As a result of the fire, equipment was damaged and the company stopped gas flow from the compressor station. The Ray facility is the largest source of working gas capacity in the state of Michigan and supplies a significant portion of Consumers' natural gas needs during peak winter periods. The fire and shutdown of the Ray facility occurred at a time of unprecedented demand in natural gas usage due to extremely cold weather conditions on January 30 and 31, 2019. To ensure continued delivery of natural gas during this emergency, Consumers arranged alternative supplies from natural gas pipelines and other storage fields, limited natural gas used for electricity production, coordinated with large commercial and industrial customers to curtail usage, and

requested that all customers conserve energy. Late on January 30, 2019, Consumers resumed operation of Plant 1 of the Ray facility; however, due to the fire, the other two plants continued to be inoperable for a period of time. To ensure the stability of the natural gas system and avoid a potentially life-threatening situation with forced outages of natural gas service to residential customers, the Michigan State Police (MSP) issued an emergency alert to cellular phones in the Lower Peninsula of Michigan asking residents to reduce their thermostats to at least 65° Fahrenheit (F) and Governor Gretchen Whitmer called on residents to do the same through the media. At 12:00 a.m. on Friday, February 1, 2019, Consumers resumed normal natural gas delivery operations.

Given the significance of this emergency event, the Commission opened this docket on February 7, 2019 (February 7 order) for the purpose of investigating the fire to determine: Consumers' response to the fire, the company's gas curtailment procedures, whether there is evidence of a failure by Consumers to properly maintain its equipment or any non-compliance with Commission rules, the total cost of the incident, and other related issues. In the February 7 order, the Commission directed Consumers to file a report in this docket addressing these issues and provided the Commission Staff (Staff) and stakeholders an opportunity to file a response to the company's report. The Staff's response was to include an anticipated timeline for the subsequent Root Cause Analysis (RCA) Report that the Commission's Gas Operations Section was to provide, and any potential changes to utility operations or procedures, if such changes were identified. The February 7 order also allowed Consumers to file a reply to the Staff's response and stakeholder input.

On April 5, 2019, Consumers filed a timely report addressing the items set forth in the February 7 order (April 5 report). The Staff filed a timely response to the company's April 5

report on May 8, 2019 (May 8 response). The Michigan Department of Attorney General (Attorney General) and the Association of Businesses Advocating Tariff Equity (ABATE) filed comments in response to the April 5 report on May 8 and 9, 2019, respectively. On May 30, 2019, the company filed a timely reply to the Staff's response and the Attorney General's and ABATE's comments (May 30 response).

On July 2, 2019, the Commission issued an order in this case (July 2 order) that reviewed Consumers' April 5 report, the stakeholder comments in response to the report, the Staff's May 8 response, and Consumers' May 30 response. In the July 2 order, the Commission directed the company to conduct a study to be filed in this docket by September 3, 2019, and to file additional reports in this docket on August 2, October 1, and November 1, 2019. The Commission directed the Staff to complete and file a final RCA Report in this docket by January 31, 2020.

On August 2, 2019, Consumers filed in this docket its Ray Natural Gas Compressor Station Storage Field Injection Timeline & Facility Repair Update. On September 3, 2019, the company filed in this docket its Compressor Station Blowdown Report & Ray Compressor Station Incident Action Plan. On October 1, 2019, Consumers filed in this docket its Ray Natural Gas Compression Station Storage Field Capacity & Repair Status Updates. Then, on November 1, 2019, the company filed in this docket its Incident Command Structure During the Ray Compressor Station Fire: an Overview and Recommendations for Improvement Report (November 1 report).

On April 29, 2020, Consumers and the Staff signed an Administrative Settlement Agreement resolving all matters related to the Staff's January 31, 2020 Compliance Action letter (January 31 letter) sent to Consumers. The January 31 letter alleged that, regarding the Ray facility incident,

the company committed probable violations of the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) Rule 49 CFR 192.167(a)(2).

According to the terms of the Administrative Settlement Agreement, attached as Exhibit A to this order, the parties agreed that Consumers “shall pay \$10,000 to the [Commission] no later than 30 days after the receipt of any minute entry accepting this Agreement.” Exhibit A, p. 2. The parties also agreed that the company’s \$10,000 payment shall not be recoverable in customer rates; however, Consumers may pursue reimbursement through other means allowed by law. In addition, the parties agreed that Consumers shall timely provide the Staff with a response letter:

indicating remedial actions that the Company will implement to address issues related to the alleged “probable violations” of Rule 49 CFR 192.167(a)(2), as indicated in Staff’s January 31, 2020 [Compliance Action] letter, with the payment addressed in Paragraph 1 of this Agreement. Once the aforementioned remedial actions have been completed, Consumers Energy shall submit a letter of final resolution which provides Staff with notice of the completion of those actions.

Exhibit A, p. 2. The Administrative Settlement Agreement was approved by the Commission in a minute action on May 8, 2020.

#### The Commission Staff’s Root Cause Analysis Report

On January 31, 2020, the Staff timely filed its final RCA Report. To begin, the Staff reviewed the Ray facility equipment, system details, and the events leading up to the fire. The Staff explained that the Ray facility has three compressor systems, Plants 1, 2, and 3, and that the facility compresses gas into and out of the Ray Storage Field, which is one of the largest storage fields in the state of Michigan. The Staff stated that, on January 30, 2019, the “ambient temperature was -8°F with wind blowing at 20 miles per hour [mph] with gusts up to 28 mph in a northeasterly direction.” RCA Report, p. 4. According to the Staff, at approximately 10:26 a.m. on January 30, 2019, Consumers’ employees observed a fire near the Plant 2 dehydration equipment and, as a result, they activated the entire Plant 3 emergency shutdown (ESD) system to

vent gas away from the fire. The Staff noted that Consumers' employees manually activated Plants 1 and 2 ESD systems at approximately 10:28 a.m. on January 30, 2019.

The Staff stated that, as part of Consumers' emergency response, the company contacted the Armada Township Fire Department, who arrived at 10:38 a.m. on January 30, 2019, and was instructed to wait in the headquarters building until the gas was fully evacuated from the station piping. The Staff explained that:

The gas took approximately five hours to fully evacuate the piping due to Consumers' personnel remotely closing the Plant 2 regulation run control valves (R4 and R8). Consumers stated that the controls [sic] valves were closed to limit the fuel being added to the existing fire. These control valves isolated a portion of the Plant 2 headers, preventing a complete Plant 2 blowdown. However, these control valves did not create a gas-tight seal, allowing gas to slowly fuel the existing fire.

RCA Report, p. 5. According to the Staff, the fire was isolated to the Plants 2 and 3 blowdown area and extinguished itself by 3:34 p.m. on January 30, 2019, when the gas venting from the blowdown silencers was completely exhausted.

The Staff stated that because the ESD for the Ray facility shut down all gas and non-emergency electrical service to the station, Consumers was concerned that there was potential for customer outages if the Ray facility remained out-of-service after 6:00 p.m. on January 30, 2019. Therefore, as the day progressed, the Staff stated that Consumers conducted formal curtailment for all non-residential customers of certain natural gas requirements. In addition, the Staff noted that Michigan residents were notified, via text message, to reduce their natural gas usage.

The Staff stated that Consumers completed its inspection of Plant 1 and found that it could be returned to service at approximately 10:40 p.m. on January 30, 2019. The Staff asserted that, as of January 30, 2019, "Plant 2 was to remain shut down due to the obvious damage" and was not returned to injection service until August 16, 2019, and withdrawal service until December 30,

2019. RCA Report, p. 7. Due to facility damage assessment and repair, the Staff stated that Plant 3 remained shut down after January 30, 2019, and was not returned to injection service until May 16, 2019, and withdrawal service until October 8, 2019.

After several onsite investigations of the Ray facility; a review of records, data, and Consumers' February 28, 2019 Third-Party Vendor Root Cause Analysis (Consumers' RCA); and discussions with the company, the Staff worked to align the timelines between the video surveillance system, the Human Machine Interface event logs, and the Historian database to determine a definitive cause of the Ray facility incident. The Staff found that "the root cause of the Consumers' Ray Compressor Station Fire that occurred on January 30, 2019, was interference from the domestic water well pump at the station, which caused a voltage spike in the grounding system of the communications system of the Plant 3 controls. This caused the system to lose communication and go into 'fault mode,' resulting in a Plant 3 ESD." RCA Report, p. 19. The Staff stated that, during the Plant 3 ESD, the blowdown silencer created a low-velocity plume of gas at a low elevation. In the Staff's opinion, the design and location of the Plant 3 blowdown silencers contributed to the significance of the fire because the low-elevation gas plume was blown by the wind into the exhaust stream of Plant 2's thermal oxidizer, causing it to ignite.

On pages 12-18 of the RCA Report, the Staff noted that, in Consumers' reports and responses filed between April 5 and November 1, 2019, the company identified the origin of the fire; created a better design for gas dispersion; performed a system-wide study of compressor station blowdown methods and designed a related incident plan; evaluated and proposed improvements to Consumers' incident command system (ICS) and procedures; composed reports regarding the Ray facility storage field capacity and natural gas injection timeline and provided an update on the

plant repairs; and reviewed communication protocols, employee training, and emergency response plans to identify areas of improvement.

However, the Staff found that the design of the blowdown silencers installed at the Ray facility, as of January 30, 2019, did not meet the requirements of 49 CFR 192.167(a)(2) because the discharge of gas created a hazard. In addition, the Staff contended that Consumers' communication with other utilities in the state of Michigan during the Ray facility incident was deficient.

### Discussion

The Commission has reviewed the Staff's RCA Report and finds it thorough, comprehensive, and informative. As noted above, Consumers timely filed reports on April 5, August 2, September 3, October 1, and November 1, 2019. In its May 8 response, the Staff stated that, although Consumers complied with several of the directives in the February 7 order, the April 5 report failed to fully investigate: (1) the abnormal operating condition in the Det-Tronics control system at the Ray facility that occurred on January 30, 2019; (2) whether the design and location of the silencer was a contributing factor to the fire; and (3) how the company can improve communication with other utilities in the event of a similar incident. Additionally, the Staff suggested that Consumers should conduct a system-wide study of compressor station blowdown methods and locations, implement countermeasures to factors that could have increased the significance of the Ray facility incident, and communicate lessons learned and best practices to industry peers.

On May 30, 2019, Consumers provided a three-page reply to the Staff that identified the origin of the fire, a possible preventative solution, and a better design for gas dispersion pipes. However, in the July 2 order, the Commission found that the April 5 report and May 30 response were too

brief and limited and that they failed to “truly reflect on the scope and scale of the incident or to take corrective measures necessary to ensure that the incident does not reoccur in the future.”

July 2 order, p. 18. As a result, the Commission directed Consumers to: (1) conduct a system-wide study of compression station blowdown methods and locations and a related incident action plan; (2) conduct an evaluation of the company’s ICS and procedures; (3) file a report in this docket that details the Ray Natural Gas Compressor Station storage field natural gas injection timeline and a status update on the plant repairs at the facility; and (4) file a final report on the Ray Natural Gas Compressor Station storage field capacity for the 2019/2020 heating season and updates on repairs and other changes made at the facility since January 31, 2019. *Id.*, pp. 24-25.

The company provided a Compressor Station Blowdown Report & Ray Compressor Station Incident Action Plan on September 3, 2019 (September 3 report). However, the report was filed prior to Consumers’ completion of gas dispersion modeling at other stations that required modeling. Consumers has yet to file an updated report demonstrating that gas dispersion modeling has been completed at all required stations.

Regarding the stations that were studied in the September 3 report, Consumers determined that “the review of gas blowdown vents and associated risk related to competent ignition sources indicates there is not a scenario that presents a fire risk similar to the Ray incident.” Consumers’ September 3 report, p. 9. The Commission also notes that Consumers has conducted a presentation for several organizations, including the American Gas Association, DTE Energy Company, and stakeholders at the Commission’s Pipeline Safety Conference, to communicate the lessons learned, recommendations, and best practices following the Ray facility incident.

In the Statewide Energy Assessment – Final Report (SEA) that was issued on September 11, 2019, in Case No. U-20464, the Commission was asked by the Governor to review contingency



risks, interdependencies, and vulnerabilities of supply/or delivery disruptions from physical and/or cybersecurity threats as well as a projected cost estimate of potential enhancements. In Section 4.5 of the SEA, “Contingency Planning Methodologies and Assumptions,” the Commission stated:

The infrastructure is designed by the utilities with safeguards in place to ensure continued operation when there is a mechanical failure. Critical assets are continuously monitored, and issues are responded to by remote operations where possible and physical response to a site as needed. The utilities have control systems and emergency operations procedures in place to deal with shutting down facilities and/or pipelines. The utilities also have emergency bypass procedures to enable continued operation of critical assets when a mechanical issue exists within that facility. When an emergency does exist at a facility, the utilities would use their procedures to work with local, state, and federal officials to control the situation and as necessary use an Incident Command System (ICS) and communicate with Emergency Operation Centers (EOC).

SEA, pp. 116-117. Additionally, in Section 9.3 of the SEA, “Compiled Recommendations and Observations for Mitigating Risks,” the Commission observed that:

some utilities do not use the Incident Command System to manage and respond to emergencies. The Commission recommends the adoption of the Incident Command System at larger utilities and cooperatives to better align with federal and state emergency responders. Additional training and use of ICS across all utilities and industries would better prepare the State of Michigan in handling energy emergencies.

SEA, p. 205.

In the RCA Report, the Staff stated that, on August 29, 2019, Consumers provided the Staff with a detailed record of emergency response steps and communications from January 30, 2019, and positive actions, mistakes, and lessons learned. In addition, the Staff noted that, on September 18, 2019, Consumers requested that MSP review the company’s “communication protocols, employee training, and emergency response plans and procedures with the intention of gaining feedback on how better to prepare for and respond to emergencies within the incident command framework.” RCA Report, p. 17. The Staff asserted that Consumers scheduled additional meetings with MSP to improve company communication and better coordinate preparation and

response to emergencies. On November 1, 2019, Consumers filed in this docket a report evaluating the company's ICS and procedures with recommended improvements.

Regarding repairs and remediation at the Ray facility, on October 1, 2019, Consumers filed a Ray Natural Gas Compressor Station Storage Field Capacity & Repair Status Updates report (October 1 report), which indicated that Plant 3 was restored to injection service on May 16, 2019, and Plant 2 was restored to injection capability on August 16, 2019. Consumers planned to restore Plants 2 and 3 to withdrawal service on December 30, 2019, and October 8, 2019, respectively. On page 19 of its RCA Report, the Staff indicated that, "[o]n January 16, 2020, Consumers provided an update on return-to-service dates for Plant 3 withdrawal and Plant 2 withdrawal operations. They indicated that their final incident report to PHMSA is planned to be submitted on February 17, 2020," and that "Consumers committed to provide updates on their proposed action plan items listed at the end of their RCA Presentation . . . by January 31, 2020 . . . ."

The Commission finds persuasive the Staff's conclusion in the RCA Report that the January 30, 2019 incident began when interference from the domestic water well pump at the Ray facility caused a voltage spike in the grounding system of the communications system of the Plant 3 controls, which then resulted in a loss of communication and a Plant 3 ESD. Consequently, during the Plant 3 ESD, the blowdown silencer created a low-velocity plume of natural gas at a low elevation, which was then blown by the wind into the exhaust stream of Plant 2's thermal oxidizer, causing it to ignite. This resulted in significant fire damage to equipment at the Ray facility and a reduced supply of natural gas on January 30 and 31, 2019.

The Staff disputed the company's assertion that the equipment installed at the Ray facility as of January 30, 2019, met the requirements of Michigan's gas regulations. Specifically, the Staff asserted that the installation violates 49 CFR 192.167(a), which states that:

Except for unattended field compressor stations of 1,000 horsepower (746 kilowatts) or less, each compressor station must have an emergency shutdown system that meets the following:

\* \* \*

(2) It must discharge gas from the blowdown piping at a location where the gas will not create a hazard.

This order concludes the Commission's investigation into the cause and impacts of the Ray facility incident that began on January 30, 2019. As the Commission has recognized in prior orders and has observed by the filings from Consumers, the Staff, and other entities, this event at the Ray facility was unique in terms of the cause and effect, and was complicated by extreme weather conditions that could have created a public safety threat if natural gas supplies had not been adequately arranged to maintain continuity of service during Arctic conditions. The Commission finds, in addition to the RCA, many lessons learned through this investigation and the Commission's broader SEA conducted for Governor Whitmer to improve resilience of energy supply and delivery. Observations from this investigation include:

- The root cause: interference from a domestic water well pump at the facility caused a voltage spike in the Plant 3 controls, leading to a loss of communication and triggering an emergency shutdown. The Plant 3 blowdown silencer, which reduced noise level, created a low-elevation gas plume. In the Staff's opinion, the design and location of the Plant 3 blowdown silencer contributed to the significance of the fire because the low-elevation gas plume was blown by the wind into the exhaust stream of Plant 2's thermal oxidizer, causing it to ignite. This fire damaged the equipment at the Ray facility, resulting in a reduced supply of natural gas on January 30 and 31, 2019.
- Redesign of the Ray facility to avoid re-occurrence: Consumers has redesigned and installed a new blowdown at Plant 3 of the Ray facility that allows gas to exit at a high velocity. Future gas ejections into the blowdown will reach a higher elevation before mixing with enough air to become combustible. *See*, Consumers' May 30 response.
- Current operational status: Plant 2 sustained the most damage and required significant repairs. Plant 2 withdrawal was the last system to become fully operational and was returned to withdrawal service on December 30, 2019.

- Review of similar operations or designs across Consumers' system: the company reviewed all its gas blowdown vents and completed dispersion modeling for each facility in its system. Consumers determined that the Ray facility had a unique system design, that there was an unusual confluence of events on January 30, 2019, and that there are no other facilities at risk for a similar event. Consumers shall submit a report summarizing the findings of the system-wide blowdown evaluation, including the dispersion modeling, no later than June 1, 2020.
- Improved incident command and communication protocols: while the overall response by Consumers and its coordination with other gas utilities, end-use customers, MSP, and state and local officials led to the system being restored and service to households being maintained through this emergency incident at the Ray facility, several improvements related to emergency management and communication protocols were identified. The company also consulted with MSP to evaluate its overall incident management system. As a result, Consumers was prompted to expand formal ICS processes and procedures to include Gas Supply and Engineering, including formal training for those employees typically not exposed to the ICS process. Additionally, Consumers recognized the potential to improve communications and has committed to updating procedure, planning exercises, and, during actual incidents, specifically addressing the Staff's suggestion that the company communicate with other utilities during times of crisis. *See, Consumers' November 1 report.*

The Commission's final SEA provides additional background on the event, as well as recommendations to improve emergency management and infrastructure planning and operations to avoid and mitigate impacts from major equipment failures, extreme weather conditions, or other contingencies that could compromise the reliability and resilience of gas supply and delivery. The SEA noted:

*In late January 2019, an extreme cold weather event combined with a fire at the Ray Compressor Station created an energy emergency in Michigan that challenged the natural gas and electric systems in a way rarely, if ever, experienced. A combination of the public appeal for natural gas conservation, curtailment of commercial and industrial electric customers, increased electric generation, as well as emergency procurement of additional natural gas supplies, provided the needed buffer for utilities to ensure safety and keep customers' homes heated. It is important to acknowledge that this event was a success story reflecting a cooperative effort on the part of Michiganders to step up when called upon to keep homes heated and lights on.*

SEA report, p. i (emphasis in original) (footnote omitted). The Commission finds that the investigation and follow-up by the Staff and Consumers, as reported in this docket, as well as the ongoing implementation of the SEA recommendations by the Commission and regulated utilities, will help ensure safe, reliable natural gas operations and mitigate risks to energy supply and delivery in an ever-changing environment.

THEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED that:

A. Consumers Energy Company shall file a final report in this docket summarizing the findings of its system-wide blowdown evaluation, including the dispersion modeling, no later than June 1, 2020.

B. The Commission's Executive Secretary is directed to close Case No. U-20463 on or after June 1, 2020, following the filing of Consumers Energy Company's final report summarizing the findings of its system-wide blowdown evaluation.

The Commission reserves jurisdiction and may issue further orders as necessary.

Any party desiring to appeal this order must do so in the appropriate court within 30 days after issuance and notice of this order, pursuant to MCL 462.26. To comply with the Michigan Rules of Court's requirement to notify the Commission of an appeal, appellants shall send required notices to both the Commission's Executive Secretary and to the Commission's Legal Counsel.

Electronic notifications should be sent to the Executive Secretary at [mpscedockets@michigan.gov](mailto:mpscedockets@michigan.gov) and to the Michigan Department of the Attorney General - Public Service Division at [pungpl@michigan.gov](mailto:pungpl@michigan.gov). In lieu of electronic submissions, paper copies of such notifications may be sent to the Executive Secretary and the Attorney General - Public Service Division at 7109 W. Saginaw Hwy., Lansing, MI 48917.

MICHIGAN PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

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Sally A. Talberg, Chairman

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Daniel C. Scripps, Commissioner

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Tremaine L. Phillips, Commissioner

By its action of May 8, 2020.

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Lisa Felice, Executive Secretary


# PROOF OF SERVICE

STATE OF MICHIGAN )

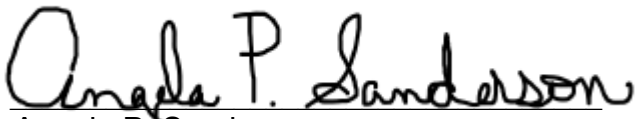
Case No. U-20463

County of Ingham )

Brianna Brown being duly sworn, deposes and says that on May 8, 2020 A.D. she electronically notified the attached list of this **Commission Order via e-mail transmission**, to the persons as shown on the attached service list (Listserv Distribution List).

  
Brianna Brown

Subscribed and sworn to before me  
this 8<sup>th</sup> day of May 2020.



Angela P. Sanderson  
Notary Public, Shiawassee County, Michigan  
As acting in Eaton County  
My Commission Expires: May 21, 2024

**Service List for Case: U-20463**

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