Lancaster Municipal Gas FAQ

1. Why is a pressure test necessary and why is a certified plumber required?

For inside piping (house lines) downstream of the meter the International Fuel Gas Code (IFGS) was adopted by the city as part of our Building Codes. It requires that the piping be checked for gas leakage before being put in service initially or after it has been idle for some time. The purpose of the IFGC is to provide standards for materials and practices that best ensure the safety of the occupants and public. Prior to the establishment of the building codes department the gas department utilized the National Fuel Gas Code which had essentially the same requirements if the IFGC. Testing of inside piping does not require an Operator Qualified plumber unless it involves working on the meter setting more than closing the meter stop. Testing of a customer service line that has been taken out of service (shut off at the curb) or newly installed requires an Operator Qualified Person. This is a Federal DOT Pipeline Safety requirement. The DOT is the regulatory body having jurisdiction over all piping up to the outlet of the meter. Lancaster has adopted by ordinance the gas departments Standards for Gas Piping on Customers' Premises wherein the requirement is that the customer or customer's representative performs a pressure test when needed.

2. Is it true that an aging meter will register less accurate than a new meter?

Yes, sort of!! We have been testing and tracking the accuracy of all old meters when they are taken out of service for several years. The only thing we can say with confidence is that when old meters lose accuracy it is in the customers favor 99.999% of the time. It is typical for meters 30 plus years old to be accurate to within +/- 2% which is the billing tolerance for gas utilities whose rates are regulated by the PUCO and also is our meter billing tolerance per city ordinance. So, in general, yes they lose accuracy in the customers favor, but usually it isn't by a significant amount. The factor that does affect measurement when a new meter is installed is that most likely the old meter was not temperature compensated and the new meter will be. In this part of the country with our winter time temperatures an old non-temperature compensated meter can result in a 4% annual gas loss for the gas department. Our new meters automatically adjust to the temperature of the gas being measured so that this loss does not occur.

3. What is the purpose of reading multipliers?

A multiplier is assign to a meter when the gas pressure in that meter is above the "standard" pressure of 7-in WC (inches of water column) and the meter doesn't have device installed on it to adjust for the higher pressure. So since the meter cannot adjust its reading it is done within the billing system in the form of a multiplier. This is possible because the gas in the meter is maintained at a constant pressure which lets us use a constant multiplier that is calculated based on that meter pressure.

4. What is the average cost/usage on a whole house generator per day?

This is a tough one! According to an energy department study I found the "average" residential customer uses about 10,000 kWh per year (27 kWh per day). Looking at one generator manufacture's literature I found, this much power can be generated for about $1 per hour ($24 a day), based on our current gas rates. Add in a central air conditioner on a hot summer day or a hot water tank with a couple of teenagers showering and all bets are off though. Power usage is so dependent on weather, family habits, etc... I think the safe thing to do is to advise a customer to contact their potential generator manufacture. You can supply them with our current gas rate information which may help them.

5. How are Gas rates determined?

There are three components to your bill;
(1) Customer Charge which is a flat monthly fee and independent of natural gas usage. (2) Base Rate which is a per unit of gas usage of cost and covers LMG's operational costs. (3) Gas Cost Recovery (GCR) which is also per unit and it is the physical gas and transportation costs on the commodity itself. Rates are determined by the cost of gas, the transportation of the gas, and operation costs. The GCR can be adjusted monthly but LMG tries to maintain a level approach with minimal changes. The Customer Charge and the Base Rates are adjusted infrequently by City Council.

6. Gas Tap Questions: How Much?

Where do you purchase? How do we connect? The costs of Gas Taps are as follows:
Inside the City: $400.00
Outside City: $525.00
Taps can be applied for at the Administrative offices of Lancaster Municipal Gas.

7. Where does LMG purchase gas?

The City of Lancaster has five interconnects (called Town Borders) with long-haul natural gas transmission companies. Four of the Town Borders are connected to Columbia Gas Transmission Co. and a new one that will be completed in 2015 is connected to Texas Eastern Transmission Co. The City of Lancaster has Firm Capacity on the pipelines and it has natural gas storage contracts. About ninety-five percent of the natural gas is purchased in the Gulf of Mexico supply basin and is transported to the City of Lancaster via its' firm capacity. The gas is purchased from a producer and then is scheduled on the interstate pipeline using an electronic bulletin board in which the nominations (requested volumes) are dispatched. Lancaster also has natural gas storage and contracts the storage capacity from the same interstate pipelines. Gas is stored underground at various Gas Storage well fields in the summer months for shipping to the Town Borders in the winter during high demand. Lancaster stores about forty-four percent of its' annual sales. There has been recent development of new natural gas supply basins in the shale formations underground. The shale is a formation that is a very tight formation and does not give up the natural gas and oil found in the formation easily. Well drilling technology has evolved to where the drill bore can go multiple directions, first vertically down to the formation and then horizontally from one drill site. Thus one well bore covers more acres of production areas. The closest shale basins to Lancaster are in Eastern Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia and are called the Marcellus and Utica Shale basins. Lancaster expects to be able to access these lower costs of supply in 2017. Pipelines that have always pumped natural gas from the Gulf of Mexico basins north through Ohio and into the northeastern U.S. must have extensive work completed to enable the local gas flow west from the shale basin to Lancaster.
Once at the Town Borders, the natural gas pressure is reduced to safer levels by regulators, disbursed through the more than three hundred miles of pipelines that are owned and maintained by Lancaster Municipal Gas, and then to Lancaster residences, commercial businesses, and industrial facilities.

8. When a customer has a gas leak, they want a percentage/discount taken off their bill. Customers own all the pipelines that serve their home past the meter and the service line up to that meter. If the leak is before the meter, then the customer does not see a charge. It is only leaks after the meter that is registered. So, LMG is absorbing the leak on the Customer pipeline before the meter. Truthfully, if the leak is large enough to cause a significant bill increase, then it probably did not occur for very long because it would have caused a very hazardous situation. Most leaks found inside a home are very small but still required to be fixed.