

SHELTER-IN-PLACE OR EVACUATE?

When people are exposed to a hazardous condition like a pipeline leak, the natural response is to get away from the hazard and evacuate the area. However, sheltering in place may be a safer alternative under certain circumstances. So how does a person know which protective action is best? The answer is, "It depends."

Each situation is different and there are many things to consider in evaluating the hazards associated with a pipeline leak. Some of the most significant include: toxicity of the product, potential exposure to fire, wind direction, proximity to the leak, adequacy of the available shelters, and the response capabilities of the affected individuals. Examples of situations where each protective action would be appropriate are shown in the table below.

GENERAL PROTECTIVE ACTIONS FOR VARIOUS PIPELINE LEAKS

Products	Evacuation	Shelter-In-Place
Natural Gas	Any size leak inside a building or enclosed space.	Small leaks in outside areas with no potential for gas migration through soil and a fire would not impact the shelter.
Petroleum Gas Petroleum Liquids Ethanol	Leaks located uphill from available shelter or where a shelter could be adversely impacted by a fire.	Small leaks located downhill (liquids) or downwind (gasses) from a shelter where a fire would not impact the shelter
Anhydrous Ammonia Carbon Dioxide	Leaks located downwind of available shelters.	Large or small leaks upwind of the location.
Products containing Hydrogen Sulfide (e.g. "Sour Gas")	Small leaks downwind and/or downhill of the location.	Large or small leaks upwind and/or uphill of the location.

Before deciding which protective action may be best in your situation, obtain specific pipeline information from the operators and discuss alternatives with your local Hazmat response team. Additional guidelines such as the U.S. DOT Emergency Response Guidebook should also be consulted.

A re-formatted copy of the Evacuation/Shelter-In-Place Decision Guide developed by the Nashua Office of Emergency Management and the Nashua Regional Planning Commission is also available as an additional resource. It addresses the pros and cons of evacuation and shelter-in-place in greater detail. It is [available for download here.](#)