

How Does Natural Gas Get to Consumers?

Clean-burning natural gas travels a long and interesting path as it makes its way from abundant domestic supply sources to homes and businesses across the United States.

Production

Natural gas is actually a mixture of many hydrocarbons, primarily methane. Natural gas is typically found in underground beds of porous rock, and retrieved from drilled wells through a series of collection pipes.

Processing

From wellhead collection points, natural gas is processed to separate valuable components like oil and natural gas liquids from impurities like water, carbon dioxide and sulfur that could cause pipeline corrosion.

Transmission

Processed natural gas is pressurized and introduced into an interstate pipeline network for safe, reliable transport. Large underground steel pipes up to 48 inches in diameter carry

natural gas from processing facilities to consumers – often for thousands of miles.

Natural gas is moved along by pressure, which also reduces the volume of the gas so that it travels more efficiently. As the gas travels, friction and elevation differences gradually reduce the pressure, so compressor stations are staggered along the length of the pipelines to give the gas another “push” or “boost.”

Distribution

The pipeline network delivers natural gas directly to some large commercial and industrial consumers, like utilities. The remainder is delivered to local distribution companies which add odorant – to ease detection of even small leaks – before transporting the gas through smaller distribution pipes, or “mains,” to millions of businesses and homes throughout the United States. Natural gas companies can store natural gas underground so that it can be used during periods of high demand.

