

IGU WOC4 (Gas Distribution) Progress Report – January 2009.

The fifth meeting of the Distribution Working Committee (WOC4) was hosted by the Czech Gas Association at the Dorint Don Giovanni Hotel, Prague, from 5th to 8th October 2009. 60 members and partners enjoyed a well-structured and enjoyable conference programme. CGA provided insights into the management of gas lighting in Central Prague and the development of a CNG-fuelled vehicle fleet. The gas museum in the RWE offices in Prague is highly recommended for anyone interested in the gas industry. Our thanks go to our hosts Oldřich Petržilka, Miloš Kebrdle, Petr Štefl and Šárka Hladíková.

The gas distribution industry's effects on the health and welfare of the general public are confirmed as the greatest driver of performance requirements. A reliable supply of gas to industrial, commercial and domestic users brings benefits to the economy and living standards in countries where such supplies are available. These benefits must be balanced against environmental and safety risks that arise if distribution integrity is allowed to decline through insufficient funding or weak regulatory control.

WOC4's work to prepare reports for WGC09 is reaching its conclusion, and each study group has completed its draft report for peer review. The study groups continue to benefit from the web-based questionnaire, which has generated a valuable database of international practices and metrics relating to WOC4's three study areas.

As customer expectations for environmental protection and public safety increase, gas network operators need to provide evidence that their systems are well managed. Good Asset Management systems can objectively monitor and compare network performance and provide demonstration that the benefits being delivered are not outweighed by safety risks or long-term damage to the environment. The SG4.1 report on the current state of the art of Asset Management in gas distribution will provide an informative assessment of good practices around the world and indicate where network operators can seek advice for the development of their own Asset Management systems and decision support tools.

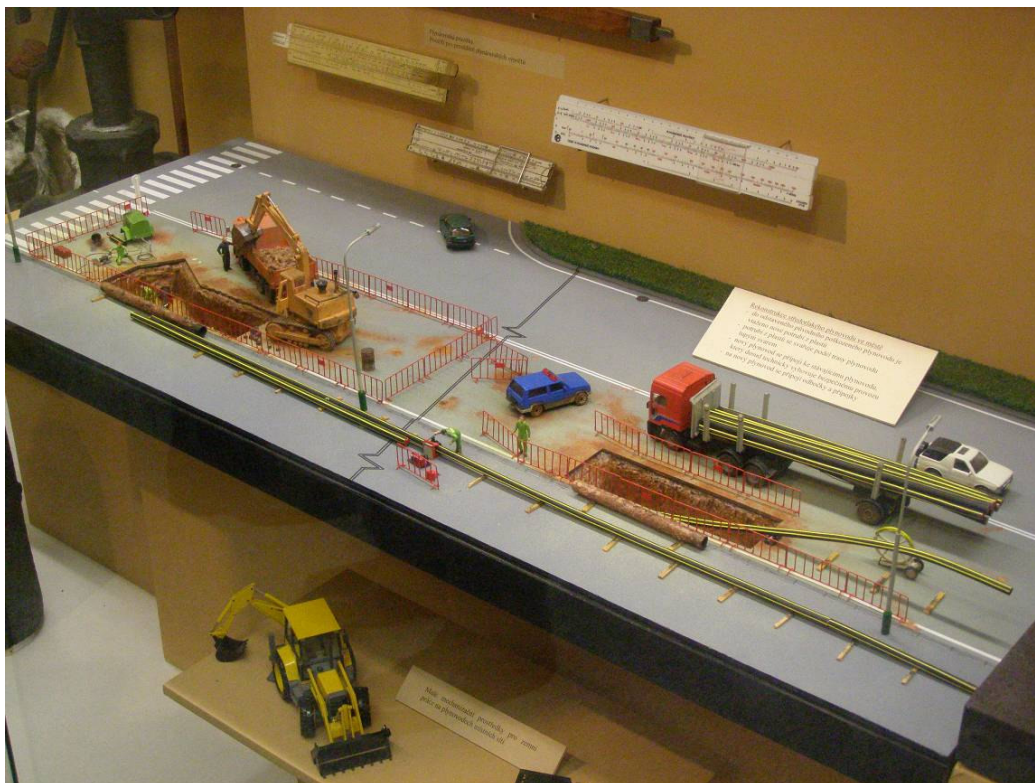
The reduction of leakage from gas distribution systems forms a key part of many operators' response to both the economic and environmental pressures bearing on the industry today. The SG4.2 report will examine the proactive measures companies have adopted to manage leakage through surveying and pressure control systems. Significant reductions in leakage can also arise from the replacement of ageing metallic systems with new pipe materials such as PE, PVC and Nylon. While leakage reductions may not, by themselves, justify the costs of replacement, improvements in public safety can tip the financial and regulatory balance in higher risk areas.

As modern materials are adopted, the challenge to locate buried pipes increases. The SG4.3 report will describe the practices adopted around the world that provide the greatest reductions in the risk of pipe damage by third parties. While it is not practicable to send an industry representative to oversee every excavation, the raising of public and construction industry awareness to the risks from buried plant appears to be a worthwhile investment in areas where pipe damage is frequent.

Robert Thomas. 7th January 2009.



WOC4 members meet with Mozart in Prague.



PE pipe laying depicted in the Prague Gas Museum



WOC4 members try out a CNG-fuelled Fiat in Prague.