

How Does Natural Gas Get to Consumers?

Production

Natural gas, a clean-burning fossil fuel, 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

The processed natural gas is pressurized and introduced into an interstate pipeline network for safe, efficient and reliable transport. Large steel pipes up to 48 inches in diameter carry the gas from processing facilities, thousands of miles,

if necessary, to consumers. The 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 gradually reduces the pressure, so compressor stations are staggered about 70 miles apart along the length of the pipelines to give the gas a boost.

Distribution

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

