



Technical Bulletin

Closing the Inspection Blind Spot: Why Exterior Fuel Line Corrosion Demands a Callout

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KEY TAKEAWAY: *Federal safety standards place 100% of post-meter gas line maintenance and ownership on the property owner, not the utility company. Gas meter piping frequently falls into a blind spot between standard inspection categories, yet identifying surface rust and missing protective coatings protects home buyers from property hazards without exceeding general inspection standards.*

Keywords: *SOP, gas meter piping, gas, plumbing, heating, exteriors.*

Across the country, millions of residential properties share an overlooked, high-liability safety hazard sitting in plain sight: corroded gas piping downstream of the meter. Oxidation produces flaking rust that degrades nominal pipe wall thickness which can compromise piping systems. While home buyers routinely assume utility companies own all piping up to the building wall, federal codes and national standards place 100% of post-meter maintenance, corrosion prevention, and repair costs directly on the property owner.

Authors' Note: *The authors collaborated with the InterNACHI leadership team to develop this article.*

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Mr Meter Painter - Who We Are and Who We Serve

Chris Bocciardi is the owner and founder of Mr Meter Painter and proud signatory contractor to The International Union of Painters and Allied Trades.



Mr Meter Painter was founded to tackle the issue of unnoticed and overlooked rusty gas meter piping. Our customer base includes homeowners, commercial building owners, property managers and HVAC companies.

SOP Gap Analysis: Where Exterior Fuel Lines Fall Through the Cracks

Under the InterNACHI Residential Standards of Practice (SOP), fuel distribution systems are addressed across multiple inspection categories. However, because exterior gas piping past the meter sits at the intersection of several sections, it frequently becomes an operational "gap" item in field practice:

- **The Plumbing Gap (Section 3.2 - Plumbing System):** Section 3.2.1.H mandates that the inspector shall inspect "the main fuel supply shut-off valve," and Section 3.2.2.A states the inspector is NOT required to inspect "fuel storage tanks or fuel supply lines." Because inspectors often read Section 3.2 as focusing on interior water lines, sewer pipes, and primary shut-offs, the exterior meter run gets bypassed.
- **The Heating System Gap (Section 3.3 - Heating):** Section 3.3.1.A requires inspectors to inspect "the heating system using normal operating controls," which includes evaluating interior fuel lines running to furnaces and boilers. Inspectors evaluate gas piping inside the basement, mechanical room, or crawlspace, but often fail to trace the fuel supply line back outside to the meter outlet.
- **The Exterior Gap (Section 3.1 - Exterior):** Section 3.1 covers wall coverings, flashing, decks, doors, and walkways, but makes no explicit callout for exterior utility penetrations or post-meter fuel lines.

Visual Defect Reporting Criteria

Evaluating post-meter fuel gas piping requires zero invasive testing, specialized tools, or code enforcement determinations (which are excluded under InterNACHI SOP Section 2.2). During exterior evaluations, inspectors should look for four visual conditions:

- **Atmospheric Pitting & Surface Scaling:** Advanced oxidation producing flaking rust that degrades nominal pipe wall thickness.
- **Soil & Mulch Contact:** Exterior gas runs buried by grade, garden beds, or mulch, creating continuous moisture traps at ground penetrations.
- **Missing Protective Coatings:** Raw, unpainted black iron or severely deteriorated paint exposing bare metal to weather and condensation.
- **Thread & Joint Oxidation:** Heavy corrosion concentrated around threaded fittings, nipples, and meter unions where moisture collects.

Regulatory Framework & Safety Impact

Under PHMSA regulations (49 CFR § 192.16), gas utilities are federally required to notify their customers that post-meter buried gas lines are not maintained by the utility and are the customer's responsibility to maintain. However, due to notices being lost in the mail, poor educational efforts on the utility's end, or a general lack of consumer knowledge, buyers frequently purchase aging homes unaware of this growing liability. The point of sale remains the single most effective intervention point to identify post-meter line corrosion—making this

an opportunity for home inspectors to lead the industry in making homeowners aware of this overlooked maintenance item. To report post-meter defects accurately, inspectors must understand the federal codes and industry safety data that place 100% of downstream line maintenance on the property owner. For a further breakdown of reference codes and inspection contexts refer to table 1.

Conclusion and Call To Action

Bringing active awareness to post-meter gas line corrosion allows home inspectors to bridge the gap between federal regulatory warnings and real-world property evaluations—fulfilling our primary duty to the public and protecting buyers before taking on a costly, hazardous liability.

Framework / Reference	Technical & Legal Requirement
NFPA 54 (National Fuel Gas Code)	Piping exposed to the atmosphere shall be protected from corrosion. Where piping is exposed to atmospheric corrosion, it shall be coated with a suitable corrosion-resistant material.
PHMSA 49 CFR § 192.16 (Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration)	Mandates that gas utilities notify customers that downstream piping is not utility-maintained and risks corrosion.
NFIRS Incident Data 2005–2025 (National Fire Incident Reporting System)	Recorded over 200 post-meter gas line leak and fire incidents across residential properties in the last 20 years with an average property damage value of roughly \$45,000.

Table 1