

South Jersey Gas upgrading equipment in Sandy-affected areas

By **WALLACE McKELVEY** Staff Writer | **Posted: Sunday, April 13, 2014 9:25 pm**

South Jersey Gas is inspecting and upgrading the equipment of 44,000 customers whose properties were affected by Hurricane Sandy.

The \$10 million infrastructure project — which would be paid for as part of a proposed 14 percent increase to utility rates — is meant to head off problems of corrosion due to flooding during the storm and prevent gas leaks in future storms.

“Currently, they are all operational,” said spokeswoman Joanne Brigandi. “We are taking a proactive approach in replacing them to ensure the continued safe and reliable delivery to our customers.”

Contractors through Precision Pipeline Solutions started work in Brigantine in February and will continue south along the shore, with an expected completion date of December 2016.

The work centers on regulators, valves adjacent to natural gas meters that reduce the delivery pressure from 60 pounds to less than a quarter of a pound for commercial and residential use. Submersion in salt water increases the risk that the regulators’ metal parts could corrode over time.

“As we saw during 2012’s storm, these areas of our service territory are susceptible to significant flooding conditions,” President Jeffrey DuBois said in a statement. “By implementing this program, we’re increasing the reliability of service we provide for our customers.”

The regulators will also be raised one foot above flood line to prevent exposure to future storms, which Brigandi said means the vent stack will be about 3 to 8 feet high.

Brigandi said the cost of the replacements — about \$230 per regulator, including labor costs — will be reflected in part in the 14 percent rate increase the utility proposed in November to cover various infrastructure projects.

Under that proposal, being considered by the state Board of Public Utilities, average residential customers using 100 therms per month would see an \$18.43 increase to their electric bill, to \$146.74.

Over the next three years, contractors will fan out along the shore to replace and raise the regulators in accordance with updated flood maps.

The process takes about an hour, and contractors carrying South Jersey Gas contractor identification will need to access customers’ homes to relight natural gas appliances.