

# LONG BEACH GAS & OIL TEAMS UP WITH VERIFORCE TO ADVANCE ITS OPERATOR QUALIFICATION PROGRAM

**Long Beach Gas & Oil (LBGO)** is a municipally-owned local distribution company (LDC) serving Long Beach, Signal Hill, and portions of other jurisdictions in southern California. LBGO is the seventh largest municipally-owned LDC in the country, operating approximately 915 miles of natural gas main and 900 miles of service line serving 150,000 meters.

Three primary objectives drove LBGO's decision to upgrade the technology associated with its operator qualification (OQ) program. LBGO wanted to:

- **Reduce re-qualification intervals**

LBGO's policy had been to re-qualify its pipeline personnel every five years, but the utility wanted to move to the current industry standard three-year interval. As part of a municipality, the organization constantly faces personnel shortages. LBGO realized that improved technology and third-party support would be needed to accomplish the additional documentation that would be required to achieve shorter intervals.

- **Expand the identified task list**

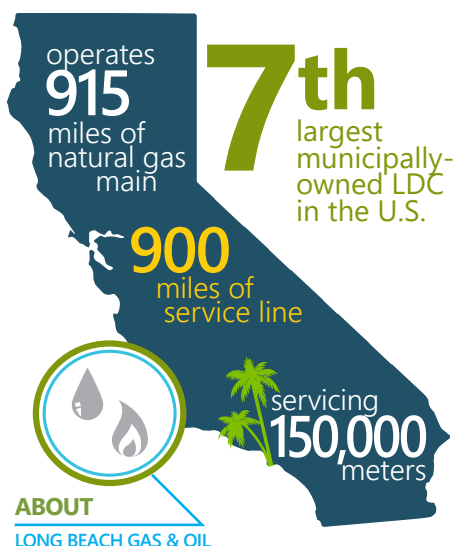
LBGO wanted to ensure that task selection for their entire pipeline operation was comprehensive and aligned with industry standards.

- **Improve overall accessibility and documentation of qualifications and training**

LBGO previously relied extensively on in-field training, with minimal documentation. The organization planned to introduce more formal training and wanted technology that would support the delivery, tracking, and documentation of the expanded program, as well as retain the flexibility to provide in-field training with improved documentation.

LBGO solicited bidders to provide third-party support and technology for its OQ program to help meet these objectives. Bidders were evaluated, interviewed, and selected by a team of subject matter experts (SMEs), supervisors, and management. The organization was looking for access to OQ expertise on a national level, comprehensive qualification document management, and a vetted system with national credibility. LBGO found these qualities in Veriforce. Key factors in the selection of Veriforce included Veriforce's involvement in the

development and maintenance of a Common Covered Task (CCT) list used among many of its operator clients, as well as the capabilities of the company's software, VeriSource™, to support the demands of LBGO's enhanced qualification program. And VeriSource, supplemented by LBGO internal practices, would allow LBGO to present a detailed account of the training provided to its employees.



Today, LBGO uses VeriSource OQ Compliance Management to administer over 1,000 individual qualifications in the in-house LBGO Pipeline Bureau. They will be on-boarding the Customer Service/Meter Setting side of the operation in 2017 as well. In addition, the organization is in the process of on-boarding the software to manage their contractor OQ program.

While LBGO is still relatively new to using VeriSource, they've found the system to be an accessible and understandable repository of data to support the LBGO OQ Program that serves the organization's current needs well. Immediate benefits have included the ability to track qualifications by job title and individual, ensure completeness of records associated with qualifications, and quickly audit qualifications. Combined with LBGO's robust mobile computing investments, LBGO Pipeline Supervisors and Inspectors can now review personnel qualifications in the field. Veriforce staff provide excellent support, and LBGO has been very pleased with the rigor of Veriforce's QA/QC of OQ documents.

Phil Carroll, Gas Pipeline Compliance Officer, says: "LBGO took two steps that we would recommend to all Veriforce clients. We adapted the CCTs (Common Covered Tasks) to the unique characteristics of the LBGO system and procedures, and we performed extensive evaluator training prior to start-up of qualifications." The process of adapting the CCTs required LBGO to review operations practices and abnormal operating condition (AOC) responses. This took place in the context of an overall review of multiple compliance-related programs and plans. "The opportunity to integrate our Operations and Maintenance Manual revision with OQ and allowing them to cross inform each program's contents is yielding additional improvements to both."

On the evaluator training front, LBGO took the initiative to administer two on-site internal evaluator training sessions, conducted by Veriforce staff, and brought in all crew chief foremen and inspectors to participate. Among the benefits of this training, it provided attendees a better understanding of the "big picture" – with background on the OQ Rule and its evolution and some perspective on industry standards – and helped create greater awareness of OQ compliance responsibilities. LBGO built upon the Veriforce training with two weeks of dedicated evaluator training and program development for those selected to be evaluators, ensuring they were well-prepared to deliver the new classroom training for LBGO pipeline crews. Says Carroll, "These steps allowed LBGO to present a professional, unique, well-thought-out qualification process to our candidates, enhanced personnel buy-in, and contributed to the overall success of the new program."

Beyond meeting the objectives stated in its bid request, LBGO has experienced added benefits from working with Veriforce to improve OQ compliance management, namely: helping to standardize operations, supporting increased camaraderie among the field crews, helping to instill a culture of continuous improvement, and bridging communication gaps between divisions within the organization. And the VeriSource technology will soon be put to the test in an upcoming PHMSA pipeline safety inspection. "We'll be ready!" says Carroll.