

Message from Southern Gas Association Regarding Management Conference and Natural Gas Connect

April 13, 2021

After careful discussion and consideration, it is our sad duty to announce that the Management Conference, scheduled for June 29- July 1, at Omni Barton Creek in Austin will not be held as an in-person event. In light of continuing COVID-19 concerns and the additional ways that the pandemic “ripple effect” has affected travel budgets and travel restrictions, we will instead be convening the Management conference entirely virtually on an entirely new platform with the conference theme of ***Innovating to A Clean Energy Future Through Unity of Effort***

Natural Gas Connect will move forward as an in-person conference combining with the Natural Gas Expo (formerly Spring Gas) scheduled for October 17-20 in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Factors driving this difficult decision

This was a very difficult decision for the SGA Executive Committee to make, particularly because the conference was cancelled in 2020. Yet, as we planned for a hybrid format, it became increasingly clear that the in-person component of our conference was likely to be severely restricted because of health concerns and travel limitations. We tried to imagine an SGA Management Conference with these necessary restrictions:

- a minimal number of operating company attendees because of health concerns and travel limitations – a survey of previous attendees and the Board of Directors revealed that only 5% of attendees would consider attending in person. That equates to about 15 people.
- a precipitous decrease in the number of roundtables because of the need for room sanitizing
- attendees would likely not be able to gather at the hotel restaurants or bars in groups
- people with accommodations would have difficulty in terms of access due to restrictions in elevator use
- all elevators would be restricted to two people at a time (can you imagine the lines?)
- registration would have included healthcare professionals hired by SGA doing mandatory temperature checks

- distanced lines to get into the conference and roundtables each morning after a health screening, etc.

These restrictions all but eliminated the positive aspects of conferencing in person. Likewise, because of the pandemic, our members who would be participating virtually would have actually had the quality of their experience lessened by the existence of the in-person component. Virtual attendees would get only a small slice of the in-person events, as streaming talks and presentations would be restricted to a small number due to exorbitant expenses. It became clear that the 2021 conference as a whole could only survive if we sacrificed the in-person component.

We want to be clear, however, that we remain committed to a future that includes in person and hybrid conferencing; we just think hybrid will be more successful when the in-person component isn't curtailed to such a drastic extent, so that both formats can flourish side by side.

Time is of the essence

While we are disappointed, we wanted to make this decision as early as possible in the process: before attendees started booking flights and hotels.

Management Conference – Keynote Speaker, The Technology Forum, Board of Director Meeting, Executive Council and Section Roundtables will be continue as planned virtually. In fact, one of the positive results of a virtual conference is access to attendees who would not have previously attended Management Conference. SGA will be offering an all-access pass to members companies.

Additional information will follow on the platform, format, roundtable sessions, registration fee and all access pricing.

In summary

Going online is not something we do lightly. But the pandemic leaves us with little choice. An early decision will allow our community to plan and engage ahead of time.

There are so many decisions we each must make every day during this pandemic—some of them life-altering—that anything we can do to provide more certainty for the community, eliminate another decision “pain point,” and provide some uncertainty reduction for our

members is a net positive. In 2020, we reassured you, “we will meet you where you are.” This holds true today. Life has gotten easier since April 2020. We’ve gotten accustomed to this way of being, and maybe we’ve each worked out some coping mechanism including co-workers in our meetings.

We know you’d rather be drinking coffee and eating pastries and networking – we would too! We will do our best to make our virtual conference as fun, as worthwhile, and as rich as it can possibly be.

In closing, let us thank you in advance for your support of the Association. Like many of you, we long for meeting colleagues and friends in person, discussing best practices and gathering socially.

We believe we can leverage the fantastic expertise and community spirit of SGA to make the Virtual Management Conference a success and stand together in these challenging times.

We’ll see you soon.

Suzanne Ogle