

PHMSA and Pipelines FAQs

What PHMSA does for pipeline safety and who else may have authority over pipelines.

1. What's PHMSA's role regarding Pipeline Safety?

Pipelines are among the safest and least costly ways of transporting large quantities of energy products essential to our economy. However, pipeline failures can kill and injure people, damage property, harm the environment and disrupt energy supplies. PHMSA's job is to protect people and the environment from pipeline failures by:

- Analyzing pipeline safety and accident data
- Evaluating which safety standards need improvement and where new rulemakings are needed
- Setting and enforcing regulations and standards for the design, construction, operation, maintenance or abandonment of pipelines by pipeline companies
- Educating operators, states and communities on how to keep pipelines safe
- Facilitating research & development into better pipeline technologies
- Training state and federal pipeline inspectors
- Administering grants to states and localities for pipeline inspections, damage prevention and emergency response.

2. How many inspectors are with PHMSA's Office of Pipeline Safety?

PHMSA has managed to increase its inspection and enforcement staff to the limits of its authority. Specifically, the Pipeline Safety Program has an authorized strength of 151 Inspection and Enforcement (I&E) employees, 90 of which are pipeline inspector positions spread across five regional offices. This administration has supported the largest percentage increase for PHMSA resources in the Fiscal Year 2013 Budget Request.

3. What does the Pipeline Safety, Regulatory Certainty, and Job Creation Act of 2011 provide?

PHMSA drafted an Administration legislative initiative for program reauthorization entitled, "Strengthening Pipeline Safety and Enforcement Act of 2010 (Act)." The proposal led to the Pipeline Safety, Regulatory Certainty, and Job Creation Act of 2011, which was signed into law by President Obama on January 3, 2012, and provides a number of strong pipeline safety measures, including:

1. Increases the maximum administrative civil penalties from \$100,000 per day/\$1 million for a series of violations to \$200,000 per day/\$2 million for a series of violations;
2. Grants authority, for the first time, to enforce oil spill response plans required of pipeline operators under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990;
3. Requires technical studies and analysis of leak detection systems, diluted bitumen, and excavation damage on pipeline safety;

4. Requires new regulations for the use of automatic or remotely controlled shut-off valves on new or replaced transmission pipelines;
5. Requires new regulations for tests to confirm material strength of previously untested gas transmission pipelines in high consequence areas (HCAs);
6. Requires regulations to confirm appropriate records to confirm maximum allowable operating pressures on gas transmission pipelines in highly populated or high consequence areas;
7. Requires a review of whether integrity management regulations should be expanded outside of high consequence areas;
8. Requires a review and report to Congress on existing Federal and State regulations for all types of gathering pipelines;
9. Requires a survey of the nation's progress in replacing cast iron gas pipelines;
10. Requires actions to increase state and local emergency responder awareness of the National Pipeline Mapping System;
11. Limits incorporation by reference into regulation of any document that is not made publicly available free of charge on the internet website; and
12. Provides for consultation with and technical assistance for Indian tribes regarding the regulation of pipelines subject to tribe jurisdiction.

For updates or to review PHMSA's progress in improving pipeline safety, visit the Pipeline Safety Update.

4. What is Integrity Management of pipelines?

Previous concepts of pipeline maintenance and inspection focused on the pipeline itself, investigating chiefly a pipeline's physical qualities, supporting systems and the administration of an operator's inspection program.

Integrity Management takes a broader view, encompassing the environment as well as pipeline. Pipeline operators are required to know more about the areas their pipeline traverses; the nature of the population in the area; the existence of environmentally sensitive areas near the pipeline. Fundamentally, Integrity Management seeks to understand the potential consequences of failure of a specific pipeline in a particular area. It sets priorities for inspection and operations and maintenance based on whether people, property or the environment might be at risk should a pipeline failure occur.

Regulations for Integrity Management of hazardous liquid pipelines have been in effect since 2001. Natural gas pipeline integrity management in High Consequence Areas (HCA) is currently being reviewed as a proposed rulemaking in the Office of Pipeline Safety and is expected to become a final rule later in 2003.

For more information on integrity management please check <http://primis.phmsa.dot.gov/iim/>

5. What's the latest on Pipeline Regulations?

You may access the most recent pipeline safety rulemakings on the Standards & Rulemakings page. Advisory bulletins and general notices are also available on Standards & Rulemakings from the right side mini-menu. Rulemakings are also published in the Federal Register.

6. What other Federal agencies have authority or interests in pipelines?

Partnership, coordination and cooperation at all levels are keys to success in protecting this essential part of our critical national infrastructure. While PHMSA is the federal pipeline safety authority, others have responsibilities or interests in pipelines. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has responsibility for coordinating security for all transportation related operations, including pipelines. Both the Department of Energy (DOE), with responsibilities for energy supplies and refinery operations, and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) with responsibilities for natural gas regulation, depend upon the safe, secure and reliable operation of the nation's pipelines.

PHMSA works closely with DOE, DHS/TSA and FERC, as well as state and local governments and industry to ensure our nation has a pipeline infrastructure that is worthy of the confidence of the American people.