

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 28, 2015

Mr. Timothy P. Butters  
Deputy Administrator  
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
East Building, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Mr. Butters:

Following one of the most devastating oil spills in California history, we need answers about why this happened, why the response was insufficient and what can be done to prevent another tragic spill like this from happening in the future. The recent rupture of a pipeline operated by Plains Pipeline, LP reportedly leaked more than 100,000 gallons of oil in Santa Barbara County. We appreciate that the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) is overseeing an investigation of the cause of the pipeline failure, and we look forward to your conclusions. This incident has raised several concerns that we would like to share with you, and we ask that you provide more information about PHMSA's requirements for oil spill response plans, training exercises, and automatic shutoff valves.

Prompt detection and communication of a pipeline failure is essential to effectively responding and minimizing impacts to the community and the environment. According to the corrective action order issued by PHMSA, Plains Pipeline employees detected anomalies in Line 901 at 11:30 a.m. PST, discovered the failure at 1:30 p.m. PST and reported the incident to the National Response Center at 2:56 p.m. PST. Based on this timeline, we are concerned that Plains Pipeline may not have detected this spill or reported it to federal officials as quickly as possible, and that these delays could have exacerbated the extent of the damage to the environment.

We are also concerned that the ruptured pipeline reportedly did not have an automatic shut-off valve, which can swiftly react to a loss in pressure, and significantly decrease the volume of oil or gas released in a pipeline failure. After the tragic San Bruno pipeline explosion in 2010, we proposed several pipeline safety provisions that were enacted into law, including a requirement that automatic or remotely controlled shutoff valves be installed on both new pipelines and old pipelines being replaced. This technology has long been recommended by the National Transportation Safety Board, and we would like to ensure that it is fully deployed to mitigate disasters like this one.

Lastly, we are concerned that the coordinated clean-up efforts may not have sufficiently utilized local resources. Often, local responder agencies are well-trained to assist in the response and clean-up effort following an oil spill. However, we have heard reports that they have not been fully utilized. We have also heard that hazardous material training for volunteers was significantly delayed, and that authorities must still determine whether sensitive tribal lands affected by the oil spill can or will be cleaned. These are all factors we would have expected to be dealt with in the oil spill response plan, and we are concerned that insufficient preparation may have slowed down the response effort.

In light of these concerns, we ask that you provide us with the following information in writing by the close of business on June 11, 2015.

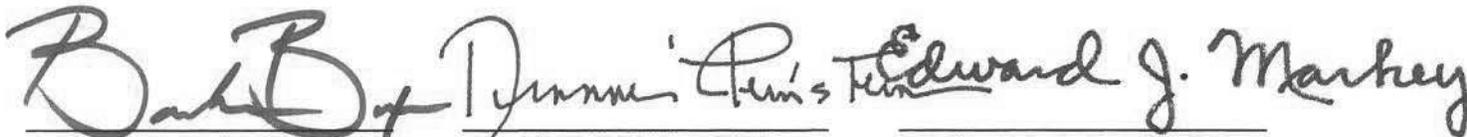
1. Please provide a complete and unredacted copy of Plains Pipeline's spill response plan for Line 901. When was this spill response plan approved by PHMSA? What is the maximum spill detection and shutdown time for Line 901 outlined in the spill response plan?
2. When was Line 901 inspected over the last 10 years either by Plains Pipeline or by PHMSA? Does PHMSA have requirements that Line 901 or other similar pipelines be inspected at regular intervals? If not, why not? Is PHMSA aware of any safety related issues identified by previous inspections of Line 901, and, if so, what steps has Plains Pipeline taken to address these issues? Is PHMSA aware of any other pipelines in this region that have been identified as a concern based on in-line or other inspections? If so, what remedial actions has PHMSA recommended?
3. In approving a spill response plan, what consideration is given by PHMSA to the coordination of oil spill response and clean-up efforts with local first responders, volunteers, and tribal governments?
4. Please describe whether local land owners, land management agencies, and other stakeholders receive oil spill preparedness and clean up response training in advance of any oil spills that may occur on their properties of interest. Please verify whether any such training was provided to any stakeholders within the affected area of the Line 901 oil spill.
5. Does PHMSA believe that it has the legal authority to require the installation of automatic or remote shut-off valves for line 901 as the pipeline is repaired, whether through an amended Corrective Action Order or other means? If not, why not. If so, will such action be required?
6. According to the corrective action order issued by PHMSA, Plains Pipeline employees detected anomalies in Line 901 at 11:30 a.m. PST, discovered the failure at 1:30 p.m. PST and reported the incident to the National Response Center at 2:56 p.m. PST. While we understand that this question may be part of PHMSA's investigation, please provide whatever information PHMSA has as to why this release of oil was not reported to the

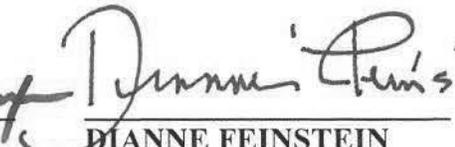
National Response Center for 1 hour and 26 minutes after it was visually confirmed by Plains employees and 3 hours and 26 minutes after anomalies were first detected?

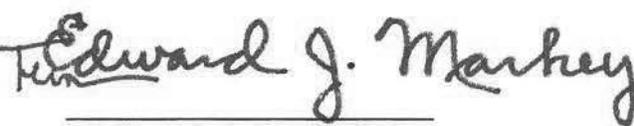
7. According to documents provided by Plains Pipeline, an employee traveled to the site and visually confirmed the release of oil at 1:30 p.m. PST. While we understand that this question may be part of PHMSA's investigation, please provide whatever information PHMSA has as to why it took two hours for Plains Pipeline to visually confirm the existence of a release of oil?

Should you have any questions about this request, please contact Kyle Chapman on Senator Boxer's staff ([kyle\\_chapman@boxer.senate.gov](mailto:kyle_chapman@boxer.senate.gov)), Trevor Higgins on Senator Feinstein's staff ([trevor\\_higgins@feinstein.senate.gov](mailto:trevor_higgins@feinstein.senate.gov)), or Morgan Gray on Sen. Markey's staff ([morgan\\_gray@markey.senate.gov](mailto:morgan_gray@markey.senate.gov)). Thank you.

Sincerely,

  
**BARBARA BOXER**  
United States Senator

  
**DIANNE FEINSTEIN**  
United States Senator

  
**EDWARD J. MARKEY**  
United States Senator



U.S. Department  
of Transportation

**Pipeline and Hazardous  
Materials Safety  
Administration**

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

JUN 11 2015

The Honorable Barbara Boxer  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Boxer:

Thank you for your letter of May 28, 2015, regarding the recent Plains crude-oil pipeline accident in Santa Barbara County, Calif. I appreciate your strong support for PHMSA's efforts to determine the cause of this pipeline failure and your commitment to ensuring the safety of the public and the environment around pipelines.

PHMSA continues to investigate the Plains Pipeline LP Line 901 pipeline failure in Santa Barbara County, Calif., that occurred on May 19, 2015. While the investigation continues, we have taken swift action to prevent any further damage from this pipeline. Specifically, PHMSA issued a Corrective Action Order (CAO) to Plains that orders it to take additional safety measures to protect the public, property, and the environment from potential hazards associated with the failure. On June 3, we amended the CAO to require Plains to take additional preventative measures on Line 903, the 127-mile, 30-inch diameter pipeline connected to Line 901. We took this additional step to help us better understand the condition of Line 903, because it has similar construction and operating characteristics as Line 901. The safety mandates we imposed will give the public an extra level of safety until PHMSA can confirm the integrity of Line 903 and its ability to safely operate.

CAOs are important enforcement tools that require the operator to determine the root cause of the failure, take additional actions to determine the condition of the pipeline, and mitigate all factors that contributed to the crude oil release. PHMSA can also require the operator to address potential future risks to people or the environment before we will approve the restart of the pipeline. Both Line 901 and Line 903 are currently shut down, and conditions have been placed on Plains before they can be restarted. This order will remain in place until we can ensure that all of the causes that led to the failure have been addressed. If we find that any of our Federal regulations were violated, we will also pursue additional enforcement action.

We have included an attachment addressing the specific questions in your letter. I and any member of PHMSA's leadership team would be happy to sit down with you or your staff to discuss any further questions you might have related to the pipeline failure.

I want to assure you that PHMSA is dedicated to the protection of people, property, and the environment from pipeline releases. We are committed to using all tools at our disposal—including corrective action orders and other enforcement tools, in addition to rigorous safety inspections—to drive attainment of our shared goal of zero pipeline spills or releases. If you

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The Honorable Barbara Boxer

have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me or have your staff contact Patricia Klinger, Deputy Director, Office of Governmental, International and Public Affairs, at (202) 366-4831 or by email at [patricia.klinger@dot.gov](mailto:patricia.klinger@dot.gov) . A similar letter has been sent to each cosigner of your letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stacy Cummings", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Stacy Cummings  
Interim Executive Director

Enclosure: 1) PHMSA Responses to Questions



U.S. Department  
of Transportation

**Pipeline and Hazardous  
Materials Safety  
Administration**

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

JUN 11 2015

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Feinstein:

Thank you for your letter of May 28, 2015, regarding the recent Plains crude-oil pipeline accident in Santa Barbara County, Calif. I appreciate your strong support for PHMSA's efforts to determine the cause of this pipeline failure and your commitment to ensuring the safety of the public and the environment around pipelines.

PHMSA continues to investigate the Plains Pipeline LP Line 901 pipeline failure in Santa Barbara County, Calif., that occurred on May 19, 2015. While the investigation continues, we have taken swift action to prevent any further damage from this pipeline. Specifically, PHMSA issued a Corrective Action Order (CAO) to Plains that orders it to take additional safety measures to protect the public, property, and the environment from potential hazards associated with the failure. On June 3, we amended the CAO to require Plains to take additional preventative measures on Line 903, the 127-mile, 30-inch diameter pipeline connected to Line 901. We took this additional step to help us better understand the condition of Line 903, because it has similar construction and operating characteristics as Line 901. The safety mandates we imposed will give the public an extra level of safety until PHMSA can confirm the integrity of Line 903 and its ability to safely operate.

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The Honorable Dianne Feinstein

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Sincerely,

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Stacy Cummings  
Interim Executive Director

Enclosure: 1) PHMSA Responses to Questions



U.S. Department  
of Transportation

**Pipeline and Hazardous  
Materials Safety  
Administration**

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

JUN 11 2015

The Honorable Ed Markey  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Thank you for your letter of May 28, 2015, regarding the recent Plains crude-oil pipeline accident in Santa Barbara County, Calif. I appreciate your strong support for PHMSA's efforts to determine the cause of this pipeline failure and your commitment to ensuring the safety of the public and the environment around pipelines.

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The Honorable Ed Markey

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Stacy Cummings  
Interim Executive Director

Enclosure: 1) PHMSA Responses to Questions

## **ENCLOSURE (1)**

*Question 1: Please provide a complete and unredacted copy of Plains Pipeline's spill response plan for Line 901. When was this spill response plan approved by PHMSA? What is the maximum spill detection and shutdown time for Line 901 outlined in the spill response plan?*

Answer:

PHMSA is in the process of posting a redacted copy of Plains Pipeline L.P.'s oil spill response plan (over 1100 pages) submitted to PHMSA under 49 CFR Part 194. As with all oil spill response plans we release, certain pieces of information are redacted for privacy and security reasons under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and 49 USC § 60138.

Furthermore, PHMSA approved Plains Pipeline L.P. Bakersfield District Spill Response Plan, which includes Line 901, on February 7, 2014. A revised version of the plan was submitted to PHMSA in July 2014. PHMSA reviewed the revised plan and affirmed the original approval date, which remained unchanged. The maximum detection and shutdown time that is stated in the plan is specifically for the pipeline that was determined to potentially generate the worst case discharge (Line 903). The time is stated to be "generally 15 minutes except where noted" (Page C-51).

*Question 2: When was Line 901 inspected over the last 10 years either by Plains Pipeline or by PHMSA? Does PHMSA have requirements that Line 901 or other similar pipelines be inspected at regular intervals? If not, why not? Is PHMSA aware of any safety related issues identified by previous inspections of Line 901, and, if so, what steps has Plains Pipeline taken to address these issues? Is PHMSA aware of any other pipelines in this region that have been identified as a concern based on in-line or other inspections? If so, what remedial actions has PHMSA recommended?*

Answer: Plains assessed the condition of Line 901 via an In-Line-Inspection (ILI) tool in 2007, 2012, and 2015. Following the transfer of regulatory authority from the California State Fire Marshal to USDOT at the end of 2012, PHMSA staff initiated two inspections beginning in 2013. One covered the control room systems that operate all Plains pipelines, including 901, and resulted in an enforcement action in 2013. The 2013 action focused on control room procedures that were not adequately followed. Specifically, PHMSA warned Plains that it had not followed management of change processes when modifying its control room procedures. Further, the company failed to completely fill out abnormal operations forms and had not documented annual controller training. Additionally, PHMSA expressed concern that historical alarms were not used in controller training and that the company had changed alarm descriptors without informing the controllers in a timely manner. Attached are copies of both enforcement letters to the company.

The other inspection covered the operation and maintenance of Line 901, including field validation, and was completed in 2014. PHMSA will be issuing an enforcement action relative to identified probable violations within two months. The enforcement case is under

development, so we are not able to provide details about the findings at this time. We will make sure you receive a copy of the letter when it is issued.

PHMSA requires operators to assess the integrity of all pipeline systems that could affect High Consequence Areas at regular intervals according to the regulations. Inspections using an ILI assessment tool are not to exceed five-year intervals. More frequent inspections may be necessary, based on the operator's unique integrity risks. In this case, the Plains 901 pipeline was placed on a 3-year reassessment interval. PHMSA was not aware of any un-addressed integrity issues pertaining to Line 901. PHMSA is reviewing other pipelines in the area and investigating whether similar safety-related conditions may exist, and, if so, will take action to address any that are found.

*Question 3: In approving a spill response plan, what consideration is given by PHMSA to the coordination of oil spill response and clean-up efforts with local first responders, volunteers, and tribal governments?*

Answer: PHMSA safety regulations at 49 CFR Part 194.107(b)(2)(iii) require an operator to be consistent with the National Response System's National Contingency Plan and applicable Area Contingency Plans (ACP) by describing the responsibilities of the operator and of Federal, State, and local agencies in removing a discharge and in mitigating or preventing a substantial threat of a discharge. The operator must certify in its response plan that it has reviewed the applicable ACP and that its response plan is consistent with the ACP. This requirement is verified during the review process by ensuring the inclusion of Federal, State, and local agency notifications that the operator expects to have pollution control responsibilities for all areas of operation covered by the response plan. Details regarding coordination with volunteers and tribal governments are found in the Los Angeles – Long Beach ACP. The Area Committee is chaired by the U.S. Coast Guard and includes oil spill response representatives from Federal, State, and local government agencies.

In addition, PHMSA requires operators to prepare and follow for each pipeline system a manual of written procedures for conducting normal operations and maintenance activities and handling abnormal operations and emergencies. This operations, maintenance, and emergencies manual must include procedures for notifying fire, police, and other appropriate public officials of hazardous liquid pipeline emergencies. PHMSA also requires operators to coordinate with public officials on emergency response drills and actual response to pipeline emergencies. (49 CFR Part 195.402(e)(7)).

*Question 4: Please describe whether local land owners, land management agencies, and other stakeholders receive oil spill preparedness and clean up response training in advance of any oil spills that may occur on their properties of interest. Please verify whether any such training was provided to any stakeholders within the affected area of the Line 901 oil spill.*

Answer: Land management agencies and certain stakeholders may receive oil spill preparedness and clean-up response training and education in advance of any oil spills in accordance with the applicable ACP, as noted above. In addition, 49 CFR § 195.440 requires each pipeline operator to develop and implement a public awareness program in accordance with the American

Petroleum Institute's Recommended Practice 1162, *Public Awareness Programs for Pipeline Operators*. Residents located along a transmission pipeline right-of-way must be provided periodically with information pertaining to the pipeline's purpose and reliability, awareness of hazards and prevention measures undertaken, damage prevention awareness, one-call requirements, leak recognition and response, pipeline location, and how to get additional information.

As part of our continuing investigation, PHMSA will review and verify compliance for: public awareness program, stakeholder communication, liaison with public officials, emergency response training, emergency response equipment availability, and notification of fire, police, and other appropriate public officials of hazardous liquid pipeline emergencies.

*Question 5: Does PHMSA believe that it has the legal authority to require the installation of automatic or remote shut-off valves for line 901 as the pipeline is repaired, whether through an amended Corrective Action Order or other means? If not, why not. If so, will such action be required?*

Answer: Under 49 U.S.C. § 60112(d), PHMSA has broad emergency authority to direct operators to take necessary corrective action when it determines that a facility is, or would be, hazardous to life, property or the environment. PHMSA can use this Corrective Action Order (CAO) authority to require an operator to take various corrective actions necessary to ensure safety including suspension or restriction of further activity, physical inspections, repairs, replacements, or other appropriate action. This may also include the installation of additional safety devices, such as automatic or remote shutoff valves, or may involve various operational changes. It should be noted that the company can contest any such requirement as part of PHMSA's informal adjudications process. CAOs are often issued after accidents, can be amended as the details of a circumstance warrant and are rescinded only upon a determination that a facility is no longer hazardous to life, property or the environment.

In this case, PHMSA has not yet determined whether additional or different valves are appropriate or whether additional or different valves would have mitigated the failure consequences. PHMSA regulations require pipeline operators to evaluate the need for emergency flow restriction devices (EFRD) in High Consequence Areas and install them where appropriate. The EFRDs can consist of check valves, remotely-controlled motorized valves, or valves that are easily accessible. Line 901 has three remotely operated motorized shut-off valves and one automatic check valve installed. These were in operation at the time of the incident and were used by control room operators in Midland, Texas, to shut down the line at 11:30 a.m. Pacific Time.

*Question 6: According to the corrective action order issued by PHMSA, Plains Pipeline employees detected anomalies in Line 901 at 11:30 a.m. PST, discovered the failure at 1:30 p.m. PST and reported the incident to the National Response Center at 2:56 p.m. PST. While we understand that this question may be part of PHMSA's investigation, please provide whatever information PHMSA has as to why this release of oil was not reported to the National Response Center for 1 hour and 26 minutes after it was visually confirmed by Plains employees and 3 hours and 26 minutes after anomalies were first detected?*

Answer: PHMSA is examining the timeline of this incident. As part of the investigation, PHMSA has collected information from responders and operator personnel on scene. That preliminary timeline was presented in our Corrective Action Order dated May 21, 2015, and indicates that Plains experienced what we believe were unusual pressure readings on the 901 line following restart of pipeline pumps. The preliminary timeline indicates that first indications of the anomalies at 10:54 a.m. resulted in the pipeline controllers shutting down and isolating the pipeline at 11:30 a.m., by shutting down pumps and closing remotely actuated valves. Plains personnel were dispatched and reported that they found the release site at 1:30 p.m.

PHMSA also sent an inspector to Plains' control room in Midland, Texas, to interview the control room operators on duty at the time of the incident and their supervisors. As part of our investigation, we are reviewing pertinent logs and information, including relevant data from the company's Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system. PHMSA does not have any definitive findings or conclusions at this time. To date, however, we have not found any information that conflicts with what was reported in our CAO issued on May 21. If PHMSA determines Plains failed to report the incident to the National Response Center (NRC) in a timely manner, we will take appropriate enforcement action.

*Question 7: According to documents provided by Plains Pipeline, an employee traveled to the site and visually confirmed the release of oil at 1:30 p.m. PST. While we understand that this question may be part of PHMSA's investigation, please provide whatever information PHMSA has as to why it took two hours for Plains Pipeline to visually confirm the existence of a release of oil?*

Answer: Our preliminary findings relative to the discovery timeline, as described in the answer to Question 6, were presented in our May 21st Corrective Action Order. We have not yet identified any information that contradicts those findings. PHMSA continues to gather information pertinent to the timeline of this incident. PHMSA will be reviewing this information as part of the investigation, but does not have any definitive findings or conclusions at this time. If PHMSA determines Plains' detection of the released oil was not timely relative to factual circumstances, then PHMSA will require corrective action and may take additional enforcement action. Further, if PHMSA determines Plains did not report the incident to the NRC after discovery in a timely manner, it will take appropriate enforcement action.

Again, I want to emphasize PHMSA's dedication to the protection of people, property, and the environment from pipeline releases. I believe our prompt mandated safety actions following recent spills, coupled with our ongoing safety inspections and enforcement actions, will help us achieve the goal of no pipeline spills or releases. If you have any questions or require additional information, do not hesitate to contact Patricia Klinger, Deputy Director, Office of Governmental, International and Public Affairs, at (202) 366-4831 or by email at [patricia.klinger@dot.gov](mailto:patricia.klinger@dot.gov).

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COMMITTEE ON  
ENERGY AND COMMERCE



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives

May 28, 2015

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(805) 349-3832

Mr. Timothy P. Butters  
Deputy Administrator  
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
East Building, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Deputy Administrator Butters:

I write to you regarding the May 19, 2015 failure of Plains Pipeline, LP's (Plains) Line 901 pipeline (pipeline) and the subsequent crude oil spill along the Gaviota Coast in the 24th Congressional district of California, which I represent.

The Santa Barbara community has sadly experienced devastating oil spills like this one in the past, most notably in 1969 when more than 4 million gallons of crude oil spilled into our ocean and onto our beaches from Union Oil's Platform A. While progress has been made since then to make oil drilling and transportation safer, spills continue to happen.

As you know, this particular spill of over 100,000 gallons of heavy crude oil has already caused severe damage to our local environment and economy, and these impacts will be felt for years to come. This spill is particularly devastating given that the Gaviota Coast is one of the most diverse and unique wildlife habitats in North America and has been largely protected from development precisely for this reason. The waters off this coastline are also important for our local economy, including recreation and commercial fishing interests.

I appreciate the briefings you provided me last week on what you have learned so far about the incident. However, many key questions remain unanswered, particularly regarding the spill detection and emergency shutoff systems. While I understand that it will take time for PHMSA to conduct its full investigation, I ask that you continue to keep my office updated on the latest steps in the Plains Spill cleanup and investigation, as well as provide my office and the public with answers to the following questions as soon as possible:

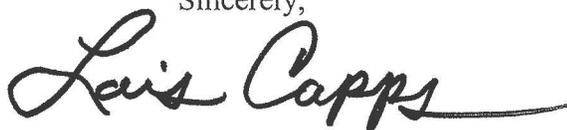
- 1) How much time elapsed between the pipeline failure and Plains becoming aware of the failure? How many gallons of oil spilled out of the pipeline after the valves were closed and the pumps were shut down?
- 2) Did Plains know the pipeline had failed prior to being contacted by local emergency personnel?

- 3) Why did it take nearly 90 minutes for Plains to report the spill to the National Response Center after it discovered the failure?
- 4) What, if any, spill detection sensors are installed on the pipeline? If there are sensors, at what intervals are these sensors installed on the pipeline?
- 5) Did Plains know of the pipeline failure prior to making a visual inspection onsite or being contacted by local emergency personnel? If yes, did they know the location of the failure prior to arriving onsite?
- 6) What emergency shutoff systems are installed on the pipeline? Did these systems function properly during this incident?
- 7) How far apart are the shutoff valves located on the pipeline? What is the volume of oil between the shut off valves? Are the valves nearer to high points of the pipeline or low points? How far away from the rupture is the nearest shutoff valve?
- 8) Are there more advanced spill detection and emergency shutoff systems available that, if installed on this pipeline, could have reduced the amount of oil spilled or prevented the spill entirely?
- 9) When will the formal analysis of the in-line inspection that took place on May 5, 2015 be completed and released to the public? Have you asked the vendor to expedite its analysis of the data collected? If not, will you?
- 10) Upon arriving at the failure site, what, if any effort did Plains personnel make to stop the spilled oil from flowing into the ocean? Are there any additional PHMSA safety requirements for pipelines near coastlines or in environmentally sensitive areas, such as the Gaviota Coast?

Additionally, as Plains proceeds with its compliance measures required under the May 21, 2015 Corrective Action Order (CAO), I urge you to make available to my office and the public any and all analyses and supporting documents submitted by Plains or produced by PHMSA regarding this incident. I also ask that you provide to my office and the public regular status updates regarding Plains' compliance with the CAO.

I look forward to working closely with you to ensure that this incident is thoroughly investigated, that those responsible are held accountable, and that federal safeguards are as strong as possible and enforced moving forward. Thank you for your attention to this issue, and I look forward to your responses.

Sincerely,



LOIS CAPPS  
Member of Congress



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
**Pipeline and Hazardous  
Materials Safety  
Administration**

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

**June 19, 2015**

The Honorable Lois Capps  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Capps:

Thank you for your letters dated May 28 and June 11, 2015, regarding the recent Plains Pipeline, LP Line 901 pipeline failure in Santa Barbara County, California, that occurred on May 19, 2015. I appreciate your strong support for PHMSA's efforts to determine the cause of this pipeline failure and for your recent invitation to meet with our inspectors and tour the failure site to gain insight into our ongoing investigation.

While PHMSA's investigation of the Plains pipeline failure continues, we have taken swift action to prevent any further damage as a result of this incident. Specifically, PHMSA issued a Corrective Action Order (CAO) to Plains that orders it to take additional safety measures to protect the public, property and the environment from potential hazards associated with the failure. Under PHMSA's authority, Line 901 remains shut down. On June 3, PHMSA amended the CAO to require Plains to take preventive measures on Line 903, the 127-mile, 30-inch diameter pipeline connected to Line 901, to help us better understand the condition and operation of Line 903. CAOs are important enforcement tools that enable PHMSA to respond quickly to conditions that pose a hazard to the public or the environment. In this case, the CAO requires the operator to determine the root cause of the failure, take additional actions to determine the condition of the pipelines, and mitigate all factors that contributed to the crude oil release.

In your May 28, 2015, letter, you raised several questions about the timeline of events on May 19. The preliminary timeline was presented in our original CAO, and we are evaluating the promptness and adequacy of the operator's reporting of the spill as part of our ongoing investigation. As part of the ongoing investigation, PHMSA collected information from on scene responders and operator personnel. PHMSA also sent an inspector to the Plains control room in Midland, Texas. The inspector interviewed the control room operators on duty at the time of the incident, and their supervisors, and reviewed pertinent logs and information, including relevant data from the Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system. Preliminary information indicates Plains implemented its emergency response procedures, as required by the pipeline safety standards, which require actions to control the flow of liquid at a release site. Plains also deployed its Oil Spill Response Organization. PHMSA's investigation

will evaluate the specific actions taken at the site and elsewhere to prevent the oil from reaching the ocean or other sensitive areas. The investigation will also evaluate the adequacy of Plains' oil spill response plan and whether the operator followed the plan.

In your May 28 letter, you also asked about spill detection sensors, emergency shutoff systems and shutoff valves on Line 901. There are pressure sensors and volumetric meters located on both ends of Line 901 that can be observed by Plains Control Center in Midland, Texas. Shutoff valves also are located at both ends of Line 901, approximately 10.7 miles apart. There are two additional shutoff valves located on either side of Refugio Creek, and one where the Venoco pipeline ties into Line 901. PHMSA regulations require pipeline operators to evaluate the need for emergency flow restriction devices (EFRD) in high consequence areas and install them where appropriate.

In your June 11 letter, you requested information about in-line inspections (ILI) of Lines 901 and 903. Our Corrective Action Order requires an expedited review and analysis of the in-line inspection (ILI) data, and the evaluation of any repair of any pipe anomalies identified as a threat to the pipeline's integrity. A third-party ILI expert will also conduct an independent review of the ILI data. PHMSA is reviewing the operator ILI summary reports as part of the investigation via a secure electronic site, and PHMSA does not possess or control the ILI data. The results of PHMSA's review of the ILI data will be included in PHMSA's investigation report and will be made available to the public once complete.

I want to assure you that safety is our top priority and PHMSA is dedicated to the protection of people, property and the environment from pipeline releases. We are committed to using all of the tools at our disposal towards our shared goal of zero pipeline spills or releases. I and any member of PHMSA's leadership team would be happy to sit down with you or your staff to discuss any further questions you might have related to the pipeline failure. If you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me or Patricia Klinger, Deputy Director, Office of Governmental, International and Public Affairs, at (202) 366-4831 or by email at [patricia.klinger@dot.gov](mailto:patricia.klinger@dot.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stacy A. Cummings". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Stacy Cummings  
Interim Executive Director

LOIS CAPPS  
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COMMITTEE ON  
ENERGY AND COMMERCE



## Congress of the United States House of Representatives

June 11, 2015

Stacy Cummings  
Interim Executive Director  
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
East Building, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Ms. Cummings:

I write to you regarding the operating status of Lines 901 and 903 of the Plains All American Pipeline on the Central Coast of California in my congressional district. As you are aware, after the May 19th crude oil spill from Line 901 along the Gaviota Coast, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) issued troubling reports of significant degradation of both Lines 901 and 903 that raise serious concerns of the ability of these lines to operate safely.

Even before the spill from this pipeline, the Santa Barbara community has regrettably had significant experience with devastating oil spills, most notably the 1969 offshore spill from Union Oil's Platform A. As a result of the 1969 spill and the community movement that stemmed from it, our community now rightfully demands very high environmental protection standards for all local industries, especially for oil and gas development. We expect companies to use the most advanced spill prevention, detection, and response technologies available, and there are serious concerns that Plains is not being held to this standard.

As you know, PHMSA's amended Corrective Action Order (CAO) issued on May 21, 2015 reported disturbing levels of corrosion on both Lines 901 and 903. According to the amended CAO, the May 5, 2015 in-line inspection data showed 45 percent metal loss at the rupture site of Line 901, yet third-party metallurgists on site estimated the metal loss at the rupture site to be closer to 80 percent, leaving only 1/16 of an inch of a metal barrier in this environmentally sensitive region. PHMSA inspectors also found three corrosion repairs near the rupture site made after the 2012 in-line inspection, and the May 5 inspection found three other areas of "extensive corrosion" on Line 901 requiring "immediate investigation and remediation."

While the spill occurred on Line 901, PHMSA also found concerning levels of corrosion on Line 903 during previous in-line inspections. In fact, an April 2013 investigation of the 38-mile segment of Line 903 between Gaviota Station and Sisquoc Station found "99 metal loss anomalies requiring investigation." A June 2013 inspection of the 75-mile segment of Line 903 between Sisquoc Station and Pentland Station found "a number of metal loss anomalies that may

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indicate general corrosion.” And the February 2014 inspection of the 15-mile segment of Line 903 between Pentland Station and Emidio Station had “two girth weld anomalies requiring investigation.”

This alarming pattern of corrosion on both Lines 901 and 903 is unacceptable and must be addressed prior to any consideration of restarting either of these pipelines. While a minimal amount of corrosion is understandable on an underground pipeline, the amount of corrosion on Lines 901 and 903 is clearly abnormal. In fact, Plains accelerated its in-line inspection schedule from once every five years to once every three years after the 2012 in-line inspection found 41 anomalies serious enough to require excavation. This pattern of significant corrosion calls into question the safety of the continued operation of these pipelines.

As I understand it, Line 903 was shut down on May 19th, restarted on May 29th, shut down again on May 30th, and will be briefly restarted again to purge Line 901 as required by PHMSA. After this purge is complete, it is critical that both of these lines remain shut down until a full investigation is complete, the corrosion issue is fully understood, corrective actions are taken, and it is demonstrated that both Lines 901 and 903 are safe to operate.

Additionally, please provide my office and the public with unredacted copies of the full results of the all in-line inspections of Lines 901 and 903 conducted in the last five years. Transparency is key to ensuring that our community is safe.

I ask that you respond to this letter in writing no later than the close of business on June 19, 2015.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lois Capps". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

LOIS CAPPS

Member of Congress