Overview of the NTSB

The Honorable Jennifer Homendy
Pipeline Safety Trust Annual Conference
October 19, 2018
NTSB History

First created in 1967 as an independent agency within the USDOT Independent Safety Board Act of 1974

- Fully independent agency
- Investigate transportation accidents
- Determine probable cause
- Issue safety recommendations
- Disaster Family Assistance
NTSB Mission

- Independent, fact based investigations
- Single focus is safety
- Objective is to determine probable cause
- Not to assign blame or decide liability
Authority of the Board

- The NTSB shall investigate or have investigated and established the facts, circumstances, and cause or probably cause of—
  - a pipeline accident in which there is a fatality or substantial property damage, or significant injury to the environment.
- Broad authority to investigate **ALL** transportation accidents
Board Members and Staff

5 Board Members
- Chairman Robert L. Sumwalt
- Vice Chairman Bruce Landsberg
- Earl F. Weener, Ph.D.
- Bella Dinh-Zarr, Ph.D., MPH
- Jennifer Homendy

- Nominated by the President, confirmed by the Senate

- 400 staff (HQ and 4 Regional Offices)
Investigative Offices

- Office of Aviation Safety
- Office of Highway Safety
- Office of Marine Safety
- Office of Railroad, Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Investigations

With investigative support from:
- Office of Research and Engineering
- Office of Safety Recommendations and Communications
Accident investigations are the primary tool used by the National Transportation Safety Board to develop recommendations for safety improvements.
Priority Of Board Investigations

- NTSB investigations have priority over investigations by other federal agencies

- Other federal agencies (FRA, EPA) may conduct concurrent investigations

Exception:
- Criminal investigations are under the control of the FBI
The NTSB leverages its resources by designating parties to its investigations.
The Party System

NTSB regulations state, in part, that “parties shall be limited to those persons, government agencies, companies, and associations whose employees, functions, activities, or products were involved in the accident or incident and who can provide suitable qualified technical personnel to actively assist in the investigation.”
The Party System

- Operator
- Federal regulators
- State regulators
- Labor organizations
- Emergency responders
- Equipment manufacturers
Investigative Hearings

To gather additional factual information about an accident in a public forum
NTSB Report Process

- Preliminary report 10-14 days after accident
- Draft report is prepared by staff
- Draft report is presented to the Board Members at a public meeting
- Board Members vote to adopt the report as presented or with modification
- Report is generally prepared within 12 to 24 months after investigation begins
Other NTSB Safety Programs

Special Investigations

- Focuses on a specific safety issue
- May involve multiple accidents
- Determines the facts, conditions, and circumstances
- Does not always determine the probable cause

Safety Studies

- Evaluate the effectiveness of Federal, State, local, and industry transportation safety programs
- Examine policy issues, program coverage, and management effectiveness
Current Investigations

• Sept 13, 2018: Lawrence, MA
• February 23, 2018: Dallas, TX
• August 2, 2017: Minnehaha, MN
• July 2, 2017: Millersville, PA
• August 9, 2016: Silver Spring, MD
Lawrence, MA

- High-pressure natural gas release into a low-pressure distribution system
- Damaged 131 structures, including 5 homes
- One fatality, 28 injuries
- Cast-iron pipe installed in the early 1900s
- 14 regulators to control gas at the required pressure into structures serviced by the system
- Tie-in project on day of accident
- Regulators no longer sensed pressure and fully opened
- Regulator shutdown at 4:30 pm; manual valves closed by 7:24 pm
Major Pipeline Accidents

• July 7, 1998: South Riding, VA
• June 10, 1999: Bellingham, WA
• August 19, 2000: Carlsbad, NM
• November 1, 2007: Carmichael, MS
• July 25, 2010: Marshall, MI
• September 9, 2010: San Bruno, CA
Congressional Action

- Pipeline Safety Improvement Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-355)
- Norman Y. Mineta Research and Specials Programs Improvement Act (P.L. 108-426)
- Pipeline Safety, Regulatory Certainty, and Job Creation Act of 2011 (P.L. 112-90)
- Protecting Our Infrastructure of Pipelines Enhancing Safety Act of 2016 (P.L. 114-183)
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