

Who We Are and What We Are Up To

Who We Are

The Pipeline Safety Trust came into being after the 1999 pipeline tragedy in Bellingham Washington where nearly a quarter-million-gallons of unleaded gasoline ruptured from the Olympic pipeline and flowed two miles down a salmon stream through the middle of Bellingham. An eighteen-year-old man



who was fly fishing in the creek was overcome by the fumes in the narrow canyon where he was fishing and fell into the gasoline filled stream and drowned. When the gasoline finally ignited it burned the entire two mile stretch of creek killing every living thing including two ten year old boys who were playing near the creek.

In the aftermath of that tragedy, while the community struggled to learn about pipelines and who regulates them, the parents who lost their children, the greater Bellingham community, and to a large degree the entire State of Washington came together to push for a

number of significant pipeline safety improvements. One of those initiatives was the creation of an independent pipeline safety watchdog to keep an eye on both the pipeline industry and the regulators to ensure that such a tragedy would never happen again in this country. In the end, the federal prosecutors who were in charge of the Olympic pipeline case were so aghast at what the pipeline company had done in Bellingham, and what the regulators had failed to do, that they too came to believe in the importance of such an independent watchdog. As part of the 2003 multi-million dollar settlement in the case the federal courts set aside four million dollars for the creation of such an independent watchdog, and the Pipeline Safety Trust was born.

The parents formed the Trust as a federal non-profit, invested the money wisely as an endowment for future operations, and undertook a yearlong strategic planning process to figure out how the Trust could become the most effective organization possible. To learn more about the Bellingham tragedy [click here](#). To download the Trust's original strategic plan [click here](#).



The Trust became the only non-profit focused on pipeline safety from a public perspective, and as such we found we were filling a void that no one else was. We were surprised and soon very busy responding to requests from the public, the pipeline industry, as well as regulators seeking out our “public” view on things. We have testified to Congress dozens of times, as well as the National Transportation Safety Board, and have been responsible for significant changes to the federal regulations. We have been invited to speak at every major pipeline industry conference, enlisted to be on multiple regulatory advisory committees, and regularly are contacted by local and national media for background and opinions on pipeline issues.

Pipeline Safety Trust's Mission

The Pipeline Safety Trust promotes pipeline safety through education and advocacy, increased access to information, and partnerships with residents, safety advocates, government, and industry, resulting in safer communities and a healthier environment.

To learn more about our present leadership and the organizations history and efforts visit our website at: <http://pstrust.org/about/>

Throughout our short history we have strived to stay true to our mission and work with anyone in an effort to increase pipeline safety. We are not an anti-pipeline group, and try to avoid “us versus them” situations preferring a strong stance in support of greater safety.

The federal judge noted when she awarded us the initial money that the Trust, with only 4 million dollars, was like “Bambi taking on Godzilla,” but she chided the pipeline industry to listen to and work with the Pipeline Safety Trust so tragedies like Bellingham do not happen again. Unfortunately other tragedies have continued to occur and there is still more work to be done to eliminate such tragedies.

THE Public Interest

While the Trust has built a large reputation, and our services are in large demand, the reality is we are a small organization with fewer than four full time employees. We regularly are forced to pass up opportunities to help citizens on specific issues, talk with major news sources, and comment on state and local pipeline regulatory issues. To move greater pipeline safety forward we need to engage more, well-informed public

voices. Through our educational materials, we hope to help you be comfortable speaking up for greater pipeline safety, and sharing the information with others who are interested.

We hope when government agencies are considering new pipeline safety rules and initiatives that some of you will add your voices to our own to help ensure that the public interest is heard over what is often a deluge of industry voices. 

While we are glad to share our educational materials and expertise as time allows, we often receive requests from individuals and groups who think we can provide them with money for their own efforts, or help pay for technical experts or attorneys. We lack the financial resources to do this, but through one of our efforts years ago grant money is available to local communities for some local efforts.

Grant Money For Communities Interested in Pipeline Safety

Every four years the national pipeline safety program administered by the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) has to be reauthorized by Congress. During the reauthorization of 2002 those who would later form the Pipeline Safety Trust pushed for inclusion of a Community Technical Assistance Grant Program where local governments and citizen groups around the country could compete for grant funds so they could independently investigate pipeline safety issues in their communities or to fund greater public involvement in various pipeline safety efforts.

This effort was successful in getting Congress to authorize such a grant program and a few years later we were successful again in getting Congress to actually fund the program. PHMSA first awarded technical assistance grants for projects beginning in 2009, and the amount of any grant may be up to \$100,000 for a single grant recipient.

PHMSA's Technical Assistance Grants (TAG) program offers opportunities to strengthen the depth and quality of public participation in pipeline safety matters. TAG program awards enable communities and groups of individuals to obtain funding for technical assistance in the form of engineering or other scientific analysis of pipeline safety issues, and/or help promote public participation in official proceedings. For purposes of grants eligibility, communities are defined as cities, towns, villages, counties, parishes, townships, and similar governmental subdivisions, or consortia of such subdivisions; or non-profit organizations. A nongovernmental group of individuals is eligible for a grant under the TAG program if its members are affected or potentially affected individuals who are incorporated as a non-profit organization in the state where they are located.

These grants may ***“not be used for lobbying, for direct advocacy for or against a pipeline construction or expansion project, or in direct support of litigation,”*** according to the statute (49 USC 60130). That certainly does not preclude communities from continuing to be part of FERC proceedings or other particular pipeline issues, just that you can not get into the particulars of those specific pipeline projects with this grant money.

The number of awards depends on the quality and number of applications received annually, and the dollar amounts requested. Follow this link for examples of past and current projects that have received PHMSA technical assistance grants: <http://primis.phmsa.dot.gov/tag/?nocache=8709>.