State Pipeline Safety Website Transparency Review: 2022
About the Pipeline Safety Trust
The Pipeline Safety Trust is a nonprofit public watchdog promoting pipeline safety through education and advocacy by increasing access to information, and by building partnerships with residents, safety advocates, government, and industry, that result in safer communities and a healthier environment.
Introduction
Over the past ten years, the Pipeline Safety Trust has conducted an annual review of each state’s pipeline safety website to determine the amount of publicly available information and how accessible it is to members of the public. The pipeline safety statutes allow for States to assume safety authority (including regulation and inspection) over intrastate gas pipelines, hazardous liquid pipelines, and underground natural gas storage through Certifications and Agreements with the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA). When the public is wondering about pipelines near their homes, they will often reach out to their state first to see how pipelines are regulated and to learn about the risks posed by pipelines. For this reason, we believe it is vital that these state websites have certain information available to the public; we then use our annual transparency review to show which states are sharing this information with the public and which are not.

This review considers a number of factors including how easily the site is found, accessibility to laws and regulatory authority information, inspection records, data related to incidents and enforcement actions, and information about the siting and routing process of new pipeline projects. In our review, there are 33 points possible on a total of 11 different criteria, resulting in a range of 0 to 3 points per individual criteria.

We are very pleased to note that 20 state programs now score at 22 or higher, meaning their scores average 2 or better on each of our criteria. In our first review, a decade ago, only 3 states performed that well, and easily half the programs scored under an average of one point per criteria. We are excited to share these visuals which highlight the overall improvement of state pipeline safety websites over the last ten years.
Overall State Performance

This first map represents the overall performance of each state for this 2022 review. We are pleased to report that more than half of the states received a passing or better overall score. We consider below 17 points to be failing, 17-24 points to be passing, 25-32 points to be good, and a perfect score of 33 points is excellent. The results of our reviews have been consistently improving each year. We would like to congratulate Washington, Nevada, and Illinois for receiving perfect scores in this year’s review!

The next visual shows each state’s average score across all categories and their individual score in each category. PST has used nearly the same methodology for all state pipeline safety websites over the last ten years. If you are interested in how we determine scores for each category, we have a scoring criteria document located on our website here. This is the document we use as we navigate each individual state website.
**Improvement Over Time**

This next chart shows just how much each state has improved over the decade of PST reviews. We weren’t kidding when we said that the states have been constantly improving! This chart shows 10-year change in the average score for each category within our review. While it is clear to see the drastic improvement in the majority of the states, it is also relatively easy to spot those states whose average score was better in 2012 than it is now in 2022, signifying a loss in transparency over the years.
Transparency by Category

State scores within certain categories of our review have also been improving at different rates over time. This next graph shows exactly that. It is interesting to see that the public’s access to transmission pipeline maps has improved significantly since we began this review in 2012. However, it is important to point out that a state can receive full points in this category simply by including a link to the National Pipeline Mapping System somewhere within the site. The other notable category with an increase in average scores is the access to excavation damage data for each state. This category has likely improved due to the significant improvement of the PHMSA state damage prevention information pages which the states can link to in order to receive full points in this category. We recently changed the scoring criteria for this category for exactly that reason, to acknowledge the improvement of the PHMSA site and reward states who link directly to that information.

Access to agency contacts and access to state laws and regulations are two categories which have received relatively low scores over the last ten years. It is hard to say why this information has decreased in accessibility over time, however we believe having clear contact information on state pipeline safety websites is one of the first steps toward creating a more transparent site. A lot of times, people with questions aren’t necessarily sure where to look for answers, even if they may be included on the website. For this reason, it is important for the public to have the ability to reach out to the staff members whose job it is to ensure the safe operation of these pipelines.
For this last visual, we grouped each individual category into three overarching categories of communication, data and maps, and information access. This allows members of the public and the state regulators to see more generally where they are doing well and where there is room for improvement. This plot is similar to others in which it is looking at the total points ranging from 0 to 3 in each category. The outside of the circle represents 3 points, the middle of the circle represents 0 points.

It is interesting to see that scores in the data and maps category stay relatively high even as other scores decrease. This likely has to do with the ease of linking to either the National Pipeline Mapping System and/or the PHMSA state damage prevention pages. It is our goal, and one we hope is shared with the state regulators, that over time these circles fill up with perfect scores leading to more transparent and accessible pipeline safety information for members of the public.
Complimentary Transparency Audits

Over the last couple of years, the Pipeline Safety Trust has provided states the opportunity to participate in our state pipeline safety website auditing program. With these audits, states that chose to participate received individualized recommendations for how to improve what they presented on their website and how they presented information to the public. Many of the states have chosen to participate in this opportunity since it began, and we have continued to provide feedback on websites to any state program that asks.

Three states this year took advantage of this opportunity and were able to work to improve their websites. Virginia increased its score by 16 to a total of 22; Nebraska improved by 24 points to 29 points and the California Public Utilities Commission (regulating gas in California) improved by 27 to reach 32 points.

Overall, we are genuinely delighted with the improvement shown over the last ten years, and with the dedication from state pipeline safety regulators to improve public access to this information. Thank you to all of the states who have already participated in our pipeline safety website audit program or who have improved their websites on their own!

If we decide to change anything within the scoring system, we will be sure to provide a revised set of criteria before we begin our review next year. If you’re interested in finding out more about our auditing or transparency review program, please contact Amanda McKay at amanda@pstrust.org.