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For More Information Contact:

Kenneth Clarkson
Communications & Outreach Director
kenneth@pstrust.org
360-543-5686 x104

Pipeline Safety Trust Publishes Report Detailing Safety Risks of Hydrogen Transportation by Pipeline

BELLINGHAM, Washington [Jan. 17, 2023] – In 2021, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act appropriated \$9.5 billion for the production of clean hydrogen, followed by even greater incentives through the hydrogen production credit in the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act. This significant funding is heralded by proponents in both government and industry who view hydrogen as a new fuel source that reduces greenhouse gas emissions. With an immense amount of capital now subsidizing the hydrogen industry, the Pipeline Safety Trust (PST) commissioned a report with independent consultant Accufacts Inc. to highlight the serious safety risks associated with hydrogen transport via pipelines.

Hydrogen’s unique physical properties make its movement, whether via gas transmission or gas distribution pipeline or whether transported as pure hydrogen or blended with natural gas, substantially more dangerous than conventional natural gas pipelines. For starters, hydrogen hosts a larger flammability range than methane (natural gas), which means it is more likely to explode, and its explosions burn hotter and are larger than that of methane. The risks are especially potent when converting existing natural gas pipelines. Hydrogen is also an indirect greenhouse gas with 33 times the warming power of CO₂ in its first 20 years.

“We call on policymakers and other decision-makers to be diligent and cautious in considering hydrogen pipeline projects,” PST Executive Director Bill Caram said. “We do not want to put our communities at increased risk and must ensure that these projects will indeed reduce greenhouse gas emissions as intended. Pipelines containing hydrogen need to be a sufficient distance away from people, prevent hydrogen from leaking, and maintain their integrity.”

The Accufacts report identifies several key knowledge gaps that exist when it comes to moving hydrogen via pipeline and PST believes they all must be addressed before a hydrogen economy is fully realized.

As a result of the report, PST has come up with a set of recommendations to advance the safety in the regulation of hydrogen pipelines. These recommendations are aimed at both the DOT's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), state regulators, and the nation's many gas utilities.

"Some basic knowledge gaps need to be addressed before making decisions on hydrogen projects, including the compatibility of different grades of steel. Basic regulatory gaps also remain, including operators currently being able to blend hydrogen into their systems without notifying the federal regulator, PHMSA," Caram said. "We still have a lot of work to do before we can keep the public safe and address greenhouse gas emissions with hydrogen."

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About 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.