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Department of Transportation’s PHMSA Proposes Rule to Enhance Pipeline Safety by Finding and Repairing All Leaks and Limiting Intentional Emissions

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration has proposed a new rule mandated by the PIPES Act of 2020 with requirements to reduce system-wide methane emissions.

BELLINGHAM, Washington [May 5, 2023] – Today, The Department of Transportation’s Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) announced a new proposed rule that would require the use of advanced leak detection programs, increase leak surveys, limit intentional emissions, and require the repair of all leaks. The new rule, which would greatly mitigate methane emissions and improve pipeline safety, will apply to 2.7 million miles of gas transmission, distribution, and gathering pipelines, in addition to 400 underground natural gas storage facilities and 165 liquified natural gas facilities.

Methane, a greenhouse gas with over 80 times the warming power of carbon dioxide over the first 20 years, is the primary component transported in natural gas pipeline systems, and until the PIPES Act of 2020, operators did not have to find nor repair many of their leaks. This new proposed rule from PHMSA, mandated by the PIPES Act of 2020, gives operators concrete standards on how to manage their systems to reduce emissions.

With the proposed rule, PHMSA has established standards to improve pipeline safety by reducing methane emissions from natural gas pipelines and other regulated facilities.

- PHMSA has required an increase in the frequency of leak surveys and the use of commercially available, advanced leak detection technology, such as aerial or vehicle surveys, handheld detection devices, and continuous monitoring systems.
- The agency has established explicit criteria and timeframes for the timely repair of all leaks.

- PHMSA has told operators to minimize intentional releases, also known as venting or blowdowns, associated with pipeline maintenance, repair, and construction and encouraging operators to consider mitigation technology.

The Pipeline Safety Trust believes it is imperative that operators comply in all of the aforementioned areas in order to improve pipeline safety by operating a natural gas pipeline system that keeps its product in the pipeline and other facilities.

Historically, one major issue in identifying leaks is that PHMSA's minimum reporting threshold for natural gas pipeline leaks was set at an unreasonably high threshold of 3 million standard cubic feet (MMCF) and intentional releases (such as venting and blowdowns) were not required to be reported nor mitigated. With this new proposed rule, PHMSA seeks to revise the reporting requirements so that all releases (both intentional and unintentional) should be reported to PHMSA at a threshold of 1 MMCF or higher.

"A safe pipeline operator is one who keeps their product in the pipeline. The proposed rule PHMSA released today is a huge step forward for pipeline safety," Pipeline Safety Trust Executive Director Bill Caram said. "The current rules were written long before we understood the potent effect methane has on our climate. Congress and PHMSA are leading a critical culture change to view methane as the pollutant it is. We don't tolerate leaks or intentional releases from oil pipelines, and we shouldn't tolerate them from natural gas pipelines either."

Find the full proposed rule [here](#).

Find PHMSA's official press release [here](#).

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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.