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## **Pipeline Safety Trust Supports PHMSA's Advanced Leak Detection Proposed Rule, Natural Gas Industry Files Comments in Opposition**

**The rule, an important step forward for pipeline safety, seeks to prevent leaks from natural gas pipelines by requiring operators to monitor and repair their systems and prevent emissions. If finalized, this rule would result in substantial safety, health, and climate benefits for the public.**

**BELLINGHAM, Washington [Aug. 22, 2023]** – On Wednesday Aug. 16, the comment period for the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration's (PHMSA) Notice of Proposed Rulemaking "Gas Pipeline Leak Detection and Repair" ended. Pipeline Safety Trust (PST) filed comments in support of the rule and hopes PHMSA can finalize the rule as quickly as possible. With the rule, PHMSA has ushered in an era of culture change, not only at the agency, but one where natural gas operators too must recognize the serious nature of leaks.

The rule was created at the request of Congress when it told PHMSA to write rules that would require gas pipeline operators to use Advanced Leak Detection technology to find and repair all hazardous methane leaks and minimize their overall methane emissions. Until now, operators have been allowed to let certain leaks flow unabated and vent methane into the atmosphere out of convenience. The current regulations, largely written before we knew the potency of methane as a greenhouse gas, are dated and in need of modernization. With the new rule, PHMSA has updated the regulations to reflect best practices on preventing leaks and minimizing harmful emissions given what we now know about methane.

The rule is also consistent with the Pipeline Safety Act, which allows PHMSA to regulate pipelines to keep communities and the environment safe. From PST's perspective, pipeline safety means keeping the product in the pipe, and the rule's requirements will advance this purpose.

Keeping product in the pipe not only saves lives, but protects our environment. Beyond explosions and fires, which have killed or maimed hundreds of people, emissions have been extremely detrimental to public health and climate. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas with over 80 times the global warming power of carbon dioxide in its first 20 years. This rule will prevent future methane emissions and in turn address some of the most immediate effects of climate change, such as extreme weather events and natural disasters.

Despite these facts, members of pipeline and natural gas trade groups, such as the American Petroleum Institute (API) and the American Gas Association (AGA), cited “significant concerns” with the rule and called for a slew of changes in filed comments to PHMSA and sought severe curtailment to nearly all core provisions of the rule.

“The pipeline industry has been leaking and venting methane into the atmosphere for decades and it needs to stop. They have an opportunity to work constructively to that end but instead point the finger – for example, blaming excavators for much of the methane they’ve released into the atmosphere – and fight this new rule that would help hold them accountable,” PST Executive Director Bill Caram said. “The public needs to know that natural gas pipeline operators are capable of running their systems without leaking and venting methane. We don’t accept leaks from hazardous liquids pipelines and we shouldn’t accept leaks from gas pipelines. Industry’s comments about this new rule do not provide us comfort.”

An especially-important aspect of PHMSA’s new rule is the positive impact it will make on the lives of those living in environmental justice communities. Environmental justice communities are already more likely to experience the detrimental effects of pipeline leaks, disasters, and the effects of climate change. This rule offers a unique opportunity for PHMSA and natural gas pipeline operators to begin to reverse this injustice.

Not without our own suggestions, PST provided in-depth comments to the docket, that if implemented, would make the rule more robust. Most importantly, we hope that the finalized rule will not deviate from Congress’ intent of minimizing methane emissions as much as possible.

The Pipeline Safety Trust hopes for a swift implementation of this rule along with an expansion that would include the entirety of the nation’s pipeline infrastructure including regulating notoriously leaky gas gathering pipelines. We also suggest that PHMSA implement more prescriptive requirements on the reduction of intentional emissions such as venting and blowdowns and provide accountability to ensure that environmental justice communities are experiencing the benefits of the rule at the same level as other communities.

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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.