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PHMSA FINALIZES PIPELINE RULEMAKINGS

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, the U.S. Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Administration (PHMSA) published in the Federal Register two final rulemakings covering liquids pipelines.

“Pipeline operators recognize the need for PHMSA to respond to congressional mandates and recommendations from federal safety and auditing agencies,” said Andy Black, President and CEO of the Association of Oil Pipe Lines (AOPL).

In today’s rulemaking PHMSA is extending reporting requirements to certain hazardous liquid gravity and rural gathering lines, requiring the inspection of pipelines in areas affected by extreme weather and natural disasters, requiring integrity assessments at least once every 10 years of onshore hazardous liquid pipeline segments located outside of high consequence areas and that are “piggable” (i.e., can accommodate in-line inspection devices), extending the required use of leak detection systems beyond high consequence areas to all regulated, non-gathering hazardous liquid pipelines, requiring that all pipelines in or affecting high consequence areas be capable of accommodating in-line inspection tools within 20 years, unless the basic construction of a pipeline cannot be modified to permit that accommodation clarifying other regulations and incorporating Sections 14 and 25 of the PIPES Act of 2016 to improve regulatory certainty and compliance. PHMSA also finalized an interim final rule establishing emergency order authority as provided for in the 2016 pipeline safety reauthorization law.

While PHMSA conducted its rulemaking, the liquids pipeline industry has moved ahead with pipeline safety improvements. Industry-sponsored safety policy teams have addressed key safety recommendations from Congress, the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board, PHMSA and issues identified through analysis of pipeline safety data. Recent safety accomplishments include developing new best practices for finding and fixing cracking in pipelines, managing leak detection programs, responding to pipeline emergencies and applying safety management systems to pipelines. Industry has also just released an updated best practice for inspecting and performing maintenance on pipelines utilizing the latest inspection technologies and analytical techniques.

The result is pipelines are getting safer. Over the last 5 years, PHMSA incident data shows pipeline operators have reduced the number of liquids pipeline incidents impacting people or the environment by 20%. PHMSA data also shows pipeline incidents impacting people or the environment caused by incorrect operation are down 38% over the last 5 years, and pipeline incidents impacting people or the environment caused by corrosion, cracking or weld failures are down 35% over the last 5 years.

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