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Transportation Department Requires Longhorn Pipeline to Complete Line Assessment Inspections Within 120 Days

The U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) announced today it would not agree to a request by Longhorn Partners Pipeline Company to indefinitely delay internal pipeline inspections.

The decision issued today reaffirms DOT's commitment to safety and to the terms of the original mitigation plan imposed on the company in 2000. Longhorn recently completed several internal inspections through the city of Austin and surrounding environmentally sensitive areas where liquid volumes provided internal inspection capability.

"DOT is committed to ensuring that operators not delay in assessing the integrity of their pipeline systems," said PHMSA Acting Administrator Brigham A. McCown. "We appreciate the progress that Longhorn is making, but an indefinite delay does not provide an adequate level of protection for the citizens and environmental areas located in the vicinity of the Longhorn pipeline system."

The order also requires the company to undertake additional safety measures, including the implementation and completion within 120 days of a program to assess external corrosion and verify pipeline integrity along a 700-mile stretch of pipeline between Houston and El Paso, TX. The pipeline passes through Austin, TX and the Barton Springs/Edwards Aquifer Water Conservation District.

The decision comes following several rounds of consultations between federal, state, and Austin-area officials.

PHMSA had previously received a request by Longhorn to extend the date of its in-line inspection of the 18-inch hazardous liquid pipeline beyond the terms stated in the mitigation plan, which required Longhorn to complete an in-line inspection within three months following system restart in January 2005. Longhorn made the request because of much lower-than-expected amounts of liquid moving through the pipeline which limits the company's ability to clean the pipeline in preparation for the required in-line inspection.

As part of the order, Longhorn must provide federal regulators with access to product volume and flow information. The information will be used to assess the company's progress in obtaining the flow levels necessary to perform internal inspections.

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