U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Pipeline and Hazardous
Materials Safety
Administration**

1200 New Jersey Ave., S.E.
Washington, DC 20590

JUN 29 2007

The Honorable Mark V. Rosenker
Chairman
National Transportation Safety Board
490 L'Enfant Plaza East, S.W.
Washington, DC 20594

Dear Chairman Rosenker:

This is an interim response to the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) Safety Recommendation emerging from the December 13, 2005 natural gas explosion in Bergenfield, New Jersey. The NTSB recommended the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) provide a summary of the lessons learned from the accident to recipients of emergency planning and response grants (NTSB Safety Recommendation P-07-1).

On December 13, 2005, a Public Service Electric and Gas Company (PSEG) natural gas service line separated at a fitting. Natural gas from the service line migrated into an apartment building, resulting in an explosion and fire that killed three people and injured four others. Our pipeline safety staff in Trenton, New Jersey responded to the incident and worked with NTSB in its investigation. The NTSB investigation determined the probable cause of the incident as the failure of the American Tank Service Company to adequately protect the natural gas service line from shifting soil during excavation, which resulted in damage to the service line and the release and migration of natural gas into the apartment building. Furthermore, NTSB determined that PSEG's excavation oversight was ineffective and that the company failed to promptly stop the flow of natural gas after the service line was damaged. Last, the Bergenfield Fire Department failed to evacuate the apartment building despite the strong evidence of a natural gas leak and the potential for gas to migrate into the building.

PHMSA takes NTSB's recommendation very seriously and is working diligently to address it. We are working with the National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM) to assemble those facts pertinent to response and recovery and to determine if it is appropriate for NASFM to issue an Advisory Bulletin to the first responder community. We will review NASFM's and DOT's joint *Pipeline Emergencies* training program to identify and implement any necessary updates in the response curriculum. We also are working with the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities to extract the lessons learned from this incident. After completing these efforts, PHMSA intends to pass along any useful information and advice, both to regulated entities and recipients of emergency planning and response grants.

I will update you on the status of these initiatives in fall 2007. Meanwhile, if you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me at (202) 366-4433.

Sincerely,

Stacey Gerard
Assistant Administrator/Chief Safety Officer