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PHMSA Proposes to Expand the Use of Excess Flow Valves in Natural Gas Distribution Pipelines

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Transportation’s Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) today announced the Federal Register publication of a proposed rulemaking to expand requirements for the use of excess flow valves beyond certain single-family homes to include additional homes and small commercial natural gas customers. The proposed rulemaking further proposes that manual service line shut-off valves (e.g., curb valves) be installed on new or replaced service lines servicing customers that use large quantities of natural gas, such as industrial facilities. Excess flow valves or curb valves are used in natural gas distribution pipelines to restrict the flow of gas if a line is broken or damaged, limiting the impact of a leak or explosion.

“Safety is our top priority and this important action will add extra protections to communities serviced by the nation’s largest network of pipelines,” said U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx. “Over 2.2 million miles of natural gas distribution pipelines, including service lines, operate in the U.S. and the use of these devices can have a significant impact on reducing the consequences of natural gas leaks, should they occur.”

Excess flow valves or curb valves are used in natural gas distribution pipelines to restrict the flow of natural gas and related methane emissions if a line is broken or damaged. Excess flow valves improve safety in the event of a failure or explosion, and contribute to broader efforts to reduce methane emissions from oil and gas infrastructure and address climate change.

Today’s Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) will work to fulfill Section 22 of the Pipeline Safety, Regulatory Certainty, and Job Creation Act of 2011, as well as National Transportation Safety Board recommendation P-01-02. Both actions call for new requirements covering the use of excess flow valves or equivalent technology in all new or replaced natural gas distribution service lines.

Federal pipeline safety regulations already require natural gas distribution pipeline operators to install excess flow valves in newly installed or replaced service lines supplying natural gas to single-family residences as part of an operator's distribution integrity management program. The NPRM proposes to expand requirements for excess flow valve installation to include all new or replaced service lines that service small commercial businesses, multi-family dwellings, and branched service lines that provide gas to multiple single-family residences.

“Public safety can be significantly threatened following the release of natural gas from a distribution pipeline, regardless of the rate of escape,” said PHMSA Interim Executive Director Stacy Cummings. “As we work to eliminate the causes of incidents that occur on distribution pipelines, especially excavation damage, the installation of these devices will add a significant safety benefit to people and property within the vicinity of a natural gas leak.”

The NPRM has been transmitted to the Federal Register for publication. An actual date of publication will be determined by the Federal Register, but a [preview of the rulemaking proposal](#) transmitted by PHMSA is available on the agency's website. PHMSA seeks public comment on the proposed amendments and the public comment period for this notice ends 60 days after the date of publication in the Federal Register. All comments can be made using the link provided at the top of the notice and should include the agency name and docket number PHMSA-2011-0009 at the beginning of the comment. The NPRM also provides instructions for submitting comments by fax or by mail.

For more information on the U.S. DOT's efforts to improve pipeline safety and awareness, including details about the proposed rule and comments received from the agency's Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, visit the PHMSA website at www.phmsa.dot.gov.

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration develops and enforces regulations for the safe, reliable, and environmentally sound operation of the nation's 2.6 million mile pipeline transportation system and the nearly 1 million daily shipments of hazardous materials by land, sea, and air. PHMSA is one of ten agencies within the U.S. Department of Transportation.

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