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DOT Issues Much-Anticipated Rules to Enhance Pipeline Safety

U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood today announced new Federal regulations for operators of natural gas and hazardous liquid pipelines. The two rules to be published in the Federal Register will include a requirement for operators of natural gas distribution pipelines to adopt integrity management programs similar to current requirements already in place for larger transmission pipelines. In addition, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) is calling for strengthened management and oversight of control room operations for all types of DOT-regulated pipelines.

“President Obama and I are both committed to the safety of America’s transportation systems, including pipelines,” said Secretary LaHood. “The new rules are not only solid investments in public safety, but also in corporate systems risk management as they will continue to add value for years to come.”

“The public deserves and expects a national pipeline transportation system that meets the highest safety standards,” said PHMSA Administrator Cynthia L. Quarterman. “These rules will improve public safety by requiring integrity management programs and installation of excess flow valves for the first time for natural gas distribution pipelines, in addition to improving the operations of the nation’s pipeline system control rooms.”

Integrity management programs combine periodic inspection and testing of a pipeline’s condition with continuous management processes to collect, integrate, analyze, and apply information about possible threats. The new integrity management rule for natural gas distribution pipelines incorporates the same basic principles as requirements for transmission pipelines, but accommodates the significant differences between the two pipeline types. In addition, the rule requires distribution operators to install excess flow

valves in new and replaced services for single-family residences where conditions are suitable for their use. Unlike requirements for transmission pipelines which are limited to “high-consequence areas,” the new distribution integrity management rules will be applied to an operator’s entire system.

The new control room management rule requires pipeline operators to establish human factors management plans and to account for National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) recommendations on supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) system displays, alarm systems and controller training. In addition, operators must establish maximum hours-of-service limits and integrate these procedures into existing operation and maintenance, operator qualifications and emergency processes.

Hazardous liquid and gas pipelines are often monitored in a control room through computer-based equipment, such as a SCADA system, that records and displays operational information about the pipeline system, such as pressures, flow rates, and valve positions. These monitoring and control actions are a principal means of managing pipeline operations. The new control room management requirements improve opportunities to reduce risk through providing more effective control of pipelines.

DOT developed the rules in cooperation with Congress, the NTSB and the pipeline industry.

The control room management rule was published in today’s *Federal Register*, and the distribution integrity management rule will be published tomorrow.

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