



**REMARKS FOR CYNTHIA L. QUARTERMAN
ADMINISTRATOR
PIPELINE AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS SAFETY ADMINISTRATION
CGA ANNUAL MEETING
SAN DIEGO, CA
-- MARCH 3, 2010 --**

Thank you Bob (Kipp) for that kind introduction. It is so wonderful to take a break from the Nation's snow capital to be here in beautiful, sunny California. Nice job in choosing a location.

On behalf of Secretary LaHood and President Obama, I would like to thank CGA not only for asking me to speak here today, but for all that you do. The Common Ground Alliance is both figuratively and literally representative of the current Administration's approach. One of the hallmarks of the new Administration has been the importance it has placed on openness in government and moving toward consensus and away from conflict. Secretary LaHood has specifically emphasized the importance of operating as one DOT, putting safety first. The Common Ground Alliance by seeking common ground to improve safety on our common grounds is a poster child for the kind of initiative that has this Administration's full support.

To give you a small measure of the level of that support, just look in the audience around you. Can the PHMSA representatives, please stand up. We are here in full force, both physically with our substantial damage prevention staff presence, being led by Steve Fischer and many others, who will be making presentations and serving on committees during this meeting, but also financially with our platinum level sponsorship for this event. The one casualty to snow shoveling-related injuries from your usual participants is Jeff Wiese, who is in DC recovering from a dislocated rib. I know that Jeff sorely misses being able to attend today. But seriously, if you have any questions about what we are doing at PHMSA with respect to damage prevention, these are the folks to ask.

DOT was integral to the creation of CGA with the Common Ground Study in 1999, and PHMSA and CGA have naturally complementary missions. PHMSA's pipeline safety mission is to ensure the safe, reliable, and environmentally sound operation of the

nation's pipeline system. Reducing excavation damage is of paramount importance to fulfilling that mission.

CGA's mission of course is broader in that you work to reduce damages to all underground utilities through shared responsibility.

We take our role in this shared responsibility very seriously.

I know it comes as no surprise to this group that in the past 20 years, excavation damage has been the number one cause of serious incidents on pipelines. But through your good work the number of incidents related to excavation damage has markedly declined, but it continues to be one of the most significant threats to pipeline safety and a key reason why PHMSA is such a strong supporter of this annual conference.

Our collective damage prevention efforts are working and we have reason to be proud of our accomplishments. The total number of damages to all underground facilities decreased by 20 percent from 2007 to 2008.

We've also seen a reduction in the number of damages caused by failure to call before digging – declining from 57 percent in 2004 to 37 percent in 2008. Still, failure to call before digging remains the number one cause of excavation damage to underground facilities and a serious threat to energy pipelines.

Our nation's pipeline infrastructure is critical to our way of life, filling the majority of our country's total energy consumption. Most of these resources are transported underground through the 2.5 million miles of pipelines that crisscross our country, putting them at risk of being damaged by excavation activities that could lead to serious consequences to people and the environment.

From 2007 through 2009, excavation damage caused approximately 27 percent of all serious hazardous liquid pipeline accidents and 16% of all serious natural gas transmission pipeline incidents. For natural gas distribution pipelines, excavation damage caused 28 percent of all incidents over the same two year period.

In the short time that I have been with PHMSA, I've been impressed with what the CGA and its members have been able to achieve in raising awareness and helping to protect underground infrastructure. It is so important, but also so difficult, to bring all the relevant players to the same table.

I applaud the dedication displayed by so many people to help make sure our common underground networks remain as safe, efficient, and reliable as possible.

I want to assure you that DOT will continue to work with all stakeholders to improve damage prevention initiatives and protect people, pipelines and the environment. Indeed, we want to devise a plan working with you to make even more progress.

CGA is a living testament to the fact that the partnership between all damage prevention stakeholders is the key ingredient to effective damage prevention. Among those stakeholders, the future success of the damage prevention program will heavily depend upon our partnership with state ground-keepers and any path forward that does not recognize their importance in this effort is doomed to fail.

To be frank, a key challenge in achieving our goals is the need for state-level stakeholders to come together, engage with one another, and address the gaps that exist in state damage prevention laws and programs.

I recognize that this is easier said than done, and I know that there have been some significant and very encouraging efforts in recent years at the state level that prove that it's possible, but we still have a way to go.

In the past several years, many states have passed new or revised damage prevention laws that have significantly strengthened damage prevention programs in those states. We are also seeing tremendous momentum among the states to implement the nine elements of effective damage prevention programs described in the PIPES Act of 2006, which stress effective communication, stakeholder partnership, improved underground locating, employee training, public education, conflict resolution, law enforcement, technology, and data analysis.

While these nine elements are not prescriptive, they are common sense principles that the states are readily adopting to make improvements in their damage prevention programs.

Since 2008, PHMSA has provided over \$4 million dollars in State Damage Prevention grants to assist with the implementation of the nine elements. The results of these grants are extremely encouraging and we commend the states who have received these grants on a job well done.

I encourage damage prevention stakeholders within each state to work together. Damage prevention is our shared responsibility and we can only meet that responsibility by working together effectively.

There are a growing number of avenues for cooperation, including Regional Common Ground Alliances, damage prevention councils, and similar stakeholder organizations.

I also encourage damage prevention stakeholders from different states to learn from one another by sharing best practices.

This conference provides a tremendous venue and opportunity for the exchange of ideas.

I challenge you to work together to create lasting change in your state's damage prevention program that will protect underground utilities and the people that live and work near them.

We need to work together to identify and address gaps in state damage prevention legislation, review damage prevention programs in the context of the nine elements and strive to implement the nine elements as appropriate within the states. Now is the time to act.

PHMSA recognizes that damage prevention is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. For example, there are several damage prevention law enforcement models that work quite well. Each presents its own advantages and disadvantages, but we can all recognize the role that effective, fair and balanced enforcement plays in reducing excavation damage to underground infrastructure. Enforcement needs to be a part of all damage prevention laws.

There is one thing that we need to nix across the board and that is exceptions to the one call laws. Next month is National Safe Digging month and I would like to issue a challenge to all state-level programs with exceptions to the one call rule to spend the month seriously debating the need for those exceptions.

I hope you share my feeling that National Safe Digging Month is a great opportunity to reach new audiences and educate them on calling before digging and the role they play in reducing excavation damage. It is also an opportunity to shine a spotlight on what each of us is doing to make sure that **everyone** who digs calls 811 first.

PHMSA is looking to support National Safe Digging Month through a variety of means in cooperation with the Common Ground Alliance and our partners around the country.

I encourage you to do the same and to use the month of April to spread your damage prevention messages and rethink those exceptions.

Before I sit down I would like to take this opportunity to encourage an additional safe practice that is extremely important to the Administration and the Department of Transportation: that is eliminating the use of distractive communication devices while operating moving machinery whether at work or at play. As Secretary LaHood would say “do the right thing, don’t text and drive.” Let me add to that, “do the right thing, call 811 before digging, without exception.”

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today.

The membership of the CGA is making great progress toward reducing excavation damage to underground infrastructure, and it is my hope that you will continue to view PHMSA as an important partner in your work.

I offer you my best wishes for a successful conference.

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