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News

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Contact: Patricia Klinger
Tel: (202) 366-4831

DOT Proposes Fine for Williams-Transco Following Rural Virginia Accident

The U.S. Department of Transportation today announced it is issuing a probable violation and proposed civil penalty notice to Williams Gas Pipeline – Transco for federal pipeline safety regulation violations. The proposed \$952,500 fine follows the Department’s investigation into the pipeline company’s September 2008 failure near Appomattox, VA.

“Today’s announcement underscores the Department’s commitment to ensuring that the nation’s energy pipeline system delivers critically needed energy supplies both safely and reliably,” said DOT’s Deputy Secretary John Porcari.

The proposed fine and probable violation is a direct result of a thorough investigation recently completed by the Department’s Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA). During the investigation, PHMSA investigators discovered possible failures by Williams-Transco to address regulatory requirements for monitoring and preventing external corrosion. Installing effective corrosion control methods has proved to be a vital maintenance function necessary to help ensure pipeline integrity.

“It is important for pipeline operators to remain vigilant in their operations to prevent ruptures from occurring, keeping our communities safe and without the disruption of energy supplies,” Deputy Secretary Porcari added. “The assessment of civil penalties is a key component of our oversight mission.”

Immediately following the accident, PHMSA issued Williams-Transco a Corrective Action Order imposing restrictions and corrective actions on the failed pipeline segment, as well as on adjacent lines. The order required the company to

immediately eliminate safety risks to surrounding public and environmental assets, including pressure reductions, internal and external inspections, and necessary repairs. In addition to addressing the immediate failure location, the order also required the company to focus attention on other segments of the pipeline to identify and address potential problem areas that could eventually lead to future pipeline failures. PHMSA personnel have continuously worked with Williams-Transco to ensure all necessary requirements included in the order are completed.

On September 14, 2008, PHMSA inspectors responded to a Williams-Transco natural gas pipeline rupture and subsequent fire in Appomattox County, VA, resulting in five injuries, the evacuation of 23 families, and the destruction of two homes. PHMSA and its state pipeline safety partners oversee about 9000 miles of Williams-Transco natural gas transmission pipelines and 3000 miles of gathering lines in 15 states and the Gulf of Mexico.

PHMSA's pipeline inspectors and its state partners are committed to ensuring the safety of America's pipeline transportation system and will continue to carefully monitor Williams-Transco activities.

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