

REMARKS FOR VADM THOMAS J. BARRETT, USCG (Ret.)
ADMINISTRATOR
PIPELINE AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS SAFETY ADMINISTRATION
AZ EMERGENCY RESPONSE COMMISSION CONFERENCE
CASA GRANDE, AZ
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(AS WRITTEN)

Thank you Dan, for that wonderful introduction and to each of you in the audience for having me here today.

Before Dan has a chance to get to his seat, I'd like to take a minute to recognize him and the Arizona Emergency Response Commission for 14 years of partnership with the USDOT in providing hazardous materials planning and training grants to the state of Arizona.

First of all, let me say how delighted I am to be here with each of you. The Bush Administration, Transportation Secretary Mary Peters, and our team at PHMSA all enjoy having you as our partners in fulfilling our commitment to ensuring public safety and environmental protection.

We are all here today because we recognize the importance of planning as a first step to mitigating safety risks posed by the potential hazards that could impact our communities. Before the passage of the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act of 1986 (EPCRA), the nation's States, Tribes and territories knew very little about the dangerous chemicals and other hazardous materials being produced, stored or transported through their communities. The EPCRA called for the establishment of State Emergency Response Commissions (SERC) and Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPC) to help our local communities protect themselves and their environments from chemical hazards by providing for the free flow of information concerning hazardous materials and the development of effective emergency response plans.

When emergency situations arise, local governments are almost always the first to learn of, and ultimately, respond to the event. This effort usually involves the members of our first responder community – our firefighters, police, medical teams and others who we each rely on for the protection of our valued interests.

As a retired "Coastie" and member of the first responder community, I am indeed an advocate of ensuring those who are on the front lines of responding to incidents are adequately equipped to perform their jobs in the safest possible way. Now as DOT's administrator of the hazardous materials safety program, I am in a position to help ensure

these individuals receive the resources they need to minimize the risks involved in responding to emergency situations nationwide.

PHMSA, along with other modal administrations at DOT, administers a comprehensive, nationwide program designed to protect our nation from risks to life, health, property, and the environment inherent in the commercial transportation of hazardous materials.

Hazardous materials are essential to our citizens, and to our economy. More than 3 billion tons of regulated hazardous materials are transported across the United States each year – a good portion of it by highway, air and rail.

At PHMSA, we oversee the safe and secure shipment of over 1.2 million daily shipments of hazardous materials in quantities ranging from several ounces to thousands of gallons. These shipments frequently move through densely populated or sensitive areas where an incident could result in loss of life, serious injury, or significant environmental damage. Our communities, particularly the workers engaged in hazardous materials commerce, count on the safe and secure transport of these shipments.

Within the Federal government, and the Department of Transportation in particular, regulatory oversight of our respective jurisdiction is important, but we all know regulation alone is not enough to fulfill our safety mission. The Department and PHMSA relies on our partners in safety such as you – State and Tribal emergency response commissions, local emergency planning committees, and first responders to help us effectively carry out our safety mission to protect the public.

Your work with us over the past few years is recognized and appreciated. As partners we have built additional bridges to protect the emergency responder community and the public. Providing training, understanding hazards through commodity flow studies, and developing hazardous materials emergency response plans has given us great results.

As great as partnerships can be we need to recognize that even healthy partnerships can be tested from time to time. To see progress, input should be shared up front and not at the end. We must bring all of our issues to the table to provide for open, results-oriented communication. Sharing information is important to gather insight from all stakeholders to make informed decision. From time to time we may disagree on an outcome. This is okay, as it's the test of a healthy relationship.

We have learned that the success of our efforts to constantly improve safety is multiplied by sharing responsibility and accomplishments with our stakeholders, both within the federal family and with states, Tribes and communities.

Any strategy to enhance safety should include mitigating the risks or consequences of an emergency. At PHMSA we have been working to save lives by implementing a “systems safety,” or risk management regulatory framework to minimize the possibility of an incident. Again, not only is this done through partnerships with up front stakeholder input, but by holding top leadership accountable for safety performance of lower level staff, identifying and supporting innovative best practices and technology development, and showing organizational transparency, both internally and externally.

Unfortunately, in 2005 the number of reported hazardous materials incidents was the highest it had been since 2001. More importantly, the number of deaths and injuries resulting from these incidents also showed an increase over the previous years. We need your help and assistance in improving these statistics.

While we do not have all the answers, we are working hard to expand our “grass roots” initiative in taking education programs directly to state and local organizations. We need your expertise to further identify and recommend what training should be offered and who needs it most—we welcome your input and look forward to hearing from you.

Ensuring the safety and preparedness of America’s emergency responders is an important goal of PHMSA and the Department of Transportation. You already know PHMSA publishes and distributes the Emergency Response Guidebook (ERG) free of charge. For years the ERG has been an important asset for first responders to use during the initial phase of a hazardous materials transportation incident.

Since 1976, PHMSA has urged the placement of a copy of the ERG in every public emergency response vehicle, including fire fighting, police, and rescue squad vehicles. As we develop the 2008 version of the ERG, we seek feedback from you on your experiences and how we can improve this next edition to fit the needs of the emergency response community. For the first time, the 2008 ERG will be expanded to even include a response section applicable to pipeline incidents.

In the coming months PHMSA will be releasing two essential documents outlining our vision for enhancing safety in our draft Strategic and Business Plans. Our Strategic Plan will address safety in pipeline and hazmat program issues, emergency response, and public outreach. Our Business Plan will describe the implementation and operational details of important issues discussed in the Strategic Plan. Similar to how we develop new regulations, we will be welcoming comments from our stakeholders on both to tell us if we’re headed in the right direction.

Being a data driven entity we want to continue to work with you to talk about and address the facts. At PHMSA we analyze the data we collect to identify areas needing a heightened focus, address rising problems early and to help shape public debate around data and facts. The data shows us who's implementing the best of best practices, who are the good companies and who needs help in rising up to the industry standard.

When meeting with company executives we remind them of their responsibility of being the first in line for safety assurance. As members of our nation's SERC's, LEPC's and emergency response network, you too are leaders within the communities you work. Your voices are key to ensuring the public stays committed and focused on following safety guidelines to mitigate risks.

Our efforts have been an asset in preparing and educating state and local officials about the importance of implementing and hazardous spill prevention techniques.

The Department of Transportation and PHMSA stand ready and willing to work with you and are proud to be your partners in hazmat safety. We offer our capability to address the public's need for safe hazardous materials transportation, as a regulator and an advocate.

Thank you again for having me today.