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U.S. Department of Transportation Proposes to Improve Safety for Truckers and Workers Around Hazardous Material Loading and Unloading Operations

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Transportation’s Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) today announced a proposed rule that would protect the public by improving the safe transfer of hazardous materials to and from cargo tank motor vehicles. The proposed rule would require additional training for employees and new safety requirements for motor carriers and facilities that transfer hazardous materials to and from cargo tank motor vehicles.

“Safety is our top priority, and this rule would help cut the safety risks to workers loading and unloading hazardous materials and to people living near those facilities,” said U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood.

PHMSA data show that the most dangerous part of transporting hazardous materials by cargo tank motor vehicles occurs when the hazardous material is being transferred by hose or pipe between the holding facility and the truck transporting it. More specifically, the data show that human error and equipment failure also cause the greatest number of incidents during loading and unloading operations, sometimes with tragic consequences.

The notice proposes to add requirements including:

- Practice drills and classroom training of truck drivers and other workers who unload or load hazardous material;
- Training on automatic valve shut down to ensure the systems are in place and that employees know how to use the systems; and
- Developing inspection and maintenance programs to ensure the safety of hoses, valves and other equipment used in loading and unloading.

“Between October and December 2010, five of the six incidents involving death or major injury were related to the loading and unloading of hazardous materials. We believe these proposed changes will increase safety and ultimately reduce the likelihood of catastrophic hazardous material incidents during loading and unloading,” said PHMSA Administrator Cynthia Quarterman.

Over the past 10 years, fatal and serious accidents during the process of transferring hazardous materials between rail or trucks and holding tanks prompted two recommendations from the National Transportation Safety Board and one from the Chemical Safety Board. Those recommendations are discussed in detail in the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and based on the following accidents:

- On July 14, 2001, in Riverview, MI, methyl mercaptan was released from a rail tank car during unloading. The material ignited, engulfing the tank car in flames. Three plant employees were killed, and 2,000 people living in the surrounding neighborhood were evacuated.
- On September 13, 2002, in Freeport, TX, a tank car containing about 6,500 gallons of oleum -- fuming sulfuric acid and sulfur trioxide -- ruptured at a transfer station. Twenty-eight people received minor injuries, and residents living within one mile had to shelter-in-place for 5-1/2 hours. Two storage tanks near the transfer station were damaged, and they released 660 gallons of the hazardous material.
- On August 14, 2002, in Festus, MO, an unloading hose ruptured releasing approximately 24 tons of chlorine over three hours. The magnitude of the incident was exacerbated because the emergency shutdown system failed. Three residents were admitted to the hospital, and hundreds were evacuated or asked to shelter-in-place.
- On August 11, 2005, in Baton Rouge, LA, a chlorine transfer hose ruptured, although the emergency shutdown system operated properly, and the release ended in under a minute.

The public comment period for this notice ends 60 days after the date of publication in the *Federal Register*. The final rule is scheduled for publication on March 11, 2011. The proposed rule is available on the PHMSA website at www.phmsa.dot.gov.

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