

U.S. Department of Transportation unveils pipeline safety initiative

McAfee & Taft RegLINC - May 2011

By Vickie Buchanan

Currently, more than 2.5 million miles of pipelines are operating to transport oil and gas across the nation. While incidents resulting in serious injury or death have declined nearly 50% over the past 20 years, a series of recent incidents has resulted in several fatalities. Nine fatalities were reported in 2008, 13 fatalities were reported in 2009, and 22 fatalities were reported in 2010. Because of these incidents, U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced a plan aimed at making the operation of pipelines safer across the nation.



U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration ("PHMSA") has inspectors and engineers which oversee the nation's pipelines to ensure that companies are complying with rules and regulations aimed at protecting individuals and the environment. In addition to regular inspections and audits by PHMSA, Secretary LaHood introduced additional safeguards to protect the public and recommended an increase in penalties when companies violate the law. Secretary LaHood has stated, "The safety of the American public is my top priority and I am taking on this critical issue to avoid future tragedies we have seen around the country."

As part of his action plan, Secretary LaHood requested that pipeline owners and operators perform thorough inspections of their pipelines, identify areas of high risk, and accelerate the timeframe to repair and replace these areas. He further announced certain federal legislation in an effort to strengthen pipeline safety. He requested that Congress act to increase the maximum civil penalties for pipeline violations from \$100,000 per day to \$250,000 per day and from \$1 million for a series of violations to \$2.5 million for a series of violations.

LINKS

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