

National Transportation Safety Board finds deficiencies in emergency notification

McAfee & Taft RegLINC - July 2011

By **Vickie Buchanan**

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigates transportation accidents, determines the probable cause of the accident, and often issues recommendations to prevent similar accidents from occurring. Recently, the NTSB has been investigating the Pacific Gas and Electric Company's (PG&E) pipeline rupture and explosion in San Bruno, California. Its investigation has revealed that emergency response procedures established by pipeline operators may rob emergency responders of the opportunity to act in the critical first minutes after a rupture or a leak of a pipeline has occurred.



On September 9, 2010, a PG&E 30-inch-diameter underground natural gas transmission pipeline ruptured in a residential area in San Bruno and released 47.6 million standard cubic feet of natural gas. The released gas ignited and caused an explosion which resulted in a crater about 72 feet long and 26 feet wide. Eight people were killed, dozens more injured, 38 homes were destroyed, and 70 more homes suffered damage.

During the NTSB's investigation, it discovered that PG&E received first notice of the rupture four minutes after it occurred but then PG&E technicians spent the next several minutes trying to interpret alarms and the low-pressure indications on the pipeline. Consequently, local emergency response agencies were not notified of the pipeline rupture for 16 minutes after it had occurred. The NTSB believes that the catastrophic nature of the rupture could have been

McAfee & Taft
REGLINC
REGULATORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, CORPORATE AND COMPLIANCE

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2 Regulate emergency life support systems for pipeline operators
- 3 National Transportation Safety Board's findings in emergency response
- 4 State of California's pipeline safety program
- 5 Pipeline safety: A new era of regulation
- 6 Pipeline safety: A new era of regulation
- 7 Pipeline safety: A new era of regulation

Senate committee reauthorizes pipeline safety programs

BY JESSIE B. PUGH

On May 6, 2011, the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee voted to pass S. 201, the Pipeline Transportation Safety Reauthorization Act of 2011, among the goals of reauthorizing the pipeline safety program one step closer to becoming reality. The bill was introduced by Sen. Landrieu (D-LA) and the leading GOP voice, and was passed by a bipartisan vote. The bill will reauthorize the program for the full House.

It is one of the few bills that will be reauthorized by the full House. The bill will reauthorize the program for the full House. The bill will reauthorize the program for the full House. The bill will reauthorize the program for the full House.

EDITOR
Chris A. Paul
Executive Director

CONTRIBUTORS
Vickie J. Buchanan
Senior Counsel
Teresa M. Buehler
Senior Counsel
Michael J. Brennan
Senior Counsel
Andrew J. Lopez
Senior Counsel
THOMAS M. BROWER
Senior Counsel

communicated to PG&E if prompt notice of the suspected rupture had been provided to emergency first responders. In turn, PG&E could have then taken aggressive measures to isolate the rupture and prevent the release while emergency first responders could have formulated an evacuation plan and a plan to minimize harm to the environment and request such assistance as necessary from other emergency agencies.

As a result, the NTSB has recommended that the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) issue guidance to pipeline operators (1) to retain specific information regarding the components of their pipeline system (2) to ensure system specific information (including pipe diameter, operating pressure, product transported and potential impact radius) is shared with emergency response agencies in communities where the pipelines are located and (3) regarding the importance of control room operators to immediately and directly notify 911 emergency call centers in the communities where the pipelines are located when a possible rupture of any pipeline is suspected.

LINKS

- [Vickie Buchanan's Bio](#)
- [McAfee & Taft RegLINC - July 2011](#)

Oklahoma City Tenth Floor • Two Leadership Square 211 N. Robinson • Oklahoma City, OK 73102-7103 (405) 235-9621 office • (405) 235-0439 fax

Tulsa 1717 S. Boulder Suite 900 • Tulsa, OK 74119 (918) 587-0000 office • (918) 599-9317 fax