

## Senate committee reauthorizes pipeline safety programs

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By Jared Burden

May 5, 2011, the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee voted to pass S. 275, the Pipeline Transportation Safety Improvement Act of 2011, moving the process of reauthorizing the pipeline safety program one step closer to becoming reality. The bill was introduced by Sens. Lautenberg (D-N.J.) and Rockefeller (D-W.Va.) and was passed by a bipartisan voice vote. The bill will now be considered by the full Senate.

If enacted, this bill will institute a regulatory scheme more rigorous than that now imposed on the pipeline industry. Among the more salient features included in the bill are stiffer penalties for violators, fines for obstructing pipeline investigations, fees for construction projects that are large or use new technology, and a provision allowing the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) to recover its costs for the oversight of pipeline design and construction projects.

The bill will also include several mandates affecting the technical specifications or reporting requirements of pipeline facilities. For example, one provision would require operators to install automatic shut-off valves on any new or entirely replaced transmission line. The bill would also institute time limits for reporting accidents and leaks to local and state government officials and emergency responders as well as give the Secretary of Transportation authority to evaluate the expansion of integrity management system requirements. In addition, the bill would eliminate the exemption from “One-Call” notification currently enjoyed by municipalities, state agencies and their contractors.



Unlike the original version of the bill, the present version allows PHMSA to maintain a status indication of each pipeline company's emergency response plan, a description of the plan's requirements, and a detailed summary of each plan. This excludes information about the location and amount of worst-case discharge scenarios as well as proprietary information. The original bill would have required posting of the complete emergency plan, drawing immediate objection from representatives of the pipeline industry concerned with the security of their facilities.

This bill also incorporates several new guidelines in response to the pipeline explosion in San Bruno, California. It will require all inter- and intrastate pipeline operators to verify their records for all gas transmission lines in Class 3 and 4 areas and Class 1 and 2 areas of high-consequence to establish maximum allowable operating pressures. This provision coincides with a PHMSA advisory issued in January 2011 which required all operators to analyze and verify the accuracy of their information about pipelines and pipeline structures.

## LINKS

- [Jared Burden's Bio](#)

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