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Survey finds majority of state pipeline safety agencies lack basic transparency

In July the Pipeline Safety Trust undertook a survey of the websites of the pipeline safety agencies in each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the federal Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) to determine if basic pipeline safety information is easily available for public review. What we found is that 75% of the states do an abysmal job of providing enough information so the public, local governments, or state legislators can determine much about pipeline safety in those states or how those agencies are performing.

We looked for eight basic items on each website and then rated how easy those items were to find. The eight items were: Contact information for agency staff; contact information for pipeline companies; pipeline safety regulations; transmission pipeline maps; incident data; inspection records; enforcement records; and excavation damage data. Only 8 states and PHMSA provided at least half of the information, with the vast majority providing far less information and in ways that made it difficult to find. PHMSA topped the survey for transparency, providing all the information.

“We believe that the public has a right to know about the pipelines that run through their communities and what pipeline safety agencies are doing to ensure they are operated safely. Only when state pipeline safety agencies provide clear evidence that they are on top of these safety issues will trust in pipeline safety be rebuilt. Unfortunately, it appears that many states seem to care little about providing the public with basic pipeline safety information to allow the public to decide if things are as safe as can be” said Carl Weimer the Pipeline Safety Trust’s executive director.

The survey findings are below and a clearer copy can also be found online at:
http://www.pstrust.org/resources/regs/publictransparencybyState_000.htm

In light of the recent revelation from California (<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2011/11/26/MN8I1M091E.DTL&ao=all#ixzz1esvN9HDw>) that some states actually preclude the public from finding out about the safety of pipelines, and the recent National Transportation Safety Board’s recommendation for clear metrics on the effectiveness of state agency oversight, the Pipeline Safety Trust hopes that this survey will help move more states toward greater transparency and inclusion of their citizenry to help make pipelines even safer.

The Pipeline Safety Trust is the only national non-profit organization that acts in the public interest to promote fuel transportation safety through education and advocacy, by increasing access to information, and by building partnerships with residents, safety advocates, government, and industry, that result in safer communities and a healthier environment.

Public Transparency by State Pipeline Safety Agencies & PHMSA - website review

	Contact Info for Agency Staff	Incident Data	Enforcement Records	Inspection Records	Transmission Pipeline Maps	Excavation Damage Data	Pipeline Company Contact Info	Easy to Access Regulations	Totals (avg)
PHMSA	3	3	3	3	3	2	1	3	2.625
Minnesota	3	3	3	0	2	2	3	3	2.375
Washington	3	3	1	3	3	0	3	3	2.375
South Dakota	3	2	2	0	2	1	3	3	2
Texas	3	3	0	0	1	1	3	3	1.75
Michigan	3	0	2	0	3	0	3	2	1.625
Arkansas	3	0	0	3	0	0	3	3	1.5
New York	2	2	2	0	0	0	3	3	1.5
Utah	3	2	2	0	0	0	2	3	1.5
Idaho	2	0	0	0	3	0	3	3	1.375
Massachusetts	3	3	2	0	0	0	0	2	1.25
Vermont	3	0	0	0	0	1	3	3	1.25
Arizona	3	0	0	1	1	1	0	3	1.125
California liquid*	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	1.125
Colorado	3	0	0	0	3	0	1	2	1.125
North Carolina	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	1.125
Rhode Island	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	1.125
South Carolina	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	1.125
Alabama	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	1
Georgia	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	1
Indiana	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	1
New Hampshire	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	1
Virginia	3	0	0	0	0	1	1	3	1
DC	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	0.875
California gas*	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	0.75
Illinois	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	2	0.75
Kansas	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.75
Maine	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	0.75
Mississippi	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0.75
Montana	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.75
Nebraska	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.75
New Mexico	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.75
Oklahoma	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.75
Oregon	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.75
Pennsylvania	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.75
Tennessee	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.75
West Virginia	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.75
Wisconsin	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	0.75
Connecticut	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.625
Delaware	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	0.625
Louisiana	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.625
Maryland	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.625
Nevada	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.625
North Dakota	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.625
Florida	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.5
Iowa	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.5
Kentucky	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.5
Missouri	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.375
Ohio	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0.375
Wyoming	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.375
Alaska**	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hawaii**	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Jersey	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

0 = can't find

1 = difficult

2 = moderate

3 = easy to find

* California is the only state that has different agencies for natural gas and liquid pipelines

** Alaska and Hawaii are the only two states that do not have agencies designated for pipeline safety

State web pages scored during a review in July 2011