

**Helping to Guide Growth**

*The Pipelines and Informed Planning Alliance has issued recommended practices for pipeline safety and land use planning.*

By Julie Halliday

As communities grow, so too do the issues surrounding the encroachment of land development on existing transmission pipelines. Therefore, in December 2010, the U. S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) released the Pipelines and Informed Planning Alliance (PIPA) report, "Partnering to Further Enhance Pipeline Safety in Communities Through Risk-Informed Land Use Planning."

The PIPA report provides recommended practices for key stakeholders, including pipeline operators, relative to proposed changes in land use and new development adjacent to existing transmission pipelines. The recommended practices address issues that often arise as urbanization and population growth crowd existing transmission pipeline corridors. PIPA's goal is to reduce risks and improve the safety of affected communities and transmission pipelines.

Upon the report's release, U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood noted: "Development of residences, businesses and green space has increased all over the country, and these areas frequently contain transmission pipelines. Safety for our communities is our number-one priority, and having these new [PIPA] guidelines in place will help communities and pipelines safely coexist."

**Plan Participants**

The PIPA report and recommended practices were developed by a structured group of representatives from local governments, public stakeholders, transmission pipeline operators and pipeline safety regulators. The result is the first set of national safety recommendations for developing areas near existing pipelines.

The participating PIPA stakeholders include: the Pipeline Safety Trust, Common Ground Alliance, National Association of Home Builders, National League of Cities (NLC), National Association of Counties, National Association of County Planners, American Land Title Association, National Association of Realtors, American Public Works Association and others. They join longtime pipeline safety organizations: PHMSA, National Association of State Fire Marshals, National Association of Pipeline Safety Representatives, National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

Also central to the PIPA initiative are pipeline operators, represented by: American Gas Association, Interstate Natural Gas Association of America, Association of Oil Pipelines, American Petroleum Institute, American Public Gas Association and Gas Producers Association.

Austin, Texas, Mayor Lee Leffingwell, who served as NLC's representative to the PIPA steering group, said the PIPA-recommended practices will "greatly contribute to the safety of residential areas as they develop around existing pipelines." Chuck Lesniak, environmental policy program manager with the Austin Watershed Protection Department, added, "The PIPA-recommended practices will provide valuable tools and guidance for local officials as they try to balance economic development, public safety and protection of important energy infrastructure."

Many of the PIPA-recommended practices may appear upon review to be “just common sense,” but in practice they and the concept of risk-informed planning have generally not been considered and will likely prove enlightening to stakeholders.

The key stakeholders for the PIPA-recommended practices include local governments, property developers/owners, transmission pipeline operators and state real estate commissions. PIPA is working to encourage these groups to become aware of, adopt and implement the recommended practices to promote awareness of and enhance pipeline safety and thus help to protect people, the environment and the pipeline infrastructure.

### **Outreach to Local Governments**

One of the key PIPA-recommended practices aims to enhance communication between property owners/developers and pipeline operators by encouraging local governments to develop and adopt consultation zones. This recommended practice, called “Define Pipeline Transmission Consultation Zone,” recommends that an affected local government define a consultation zone to promote communication between property developers/owners and operators of existing nearby transmission pipelines when new land uses and property developments are being planned. Establishing good communications between pipeline operators and developers is much more effective than, for example, establishing fixed-distance setbacks from transmission pipeline rights-of-way.

The consultation zone concept is based on the belief that pipeline risks can most often be addressed with proper *risk-informed* planning and design for land use changes and development. Involving the pipeline operator early in the planning process can ensure adequate time to incorporate solutions to address any operator safety concerns. The operator can determine if there are any pipelines in the planning area and where they are, and the property developer or project planner then can communicate with the pipeline operator to help make risk-informed decisions about what effects a planned project may have on the pipelines and what effects the pipelines may have on the proposed development.

The PIPA Communication Team plans to contact selected local governments in communities that are growing significantly and have a relatively high density of existing transmission pipelines to make them aware of and encourage the development of consultation zones.

Another recommended practice, referred to as “Adopt Transmission Pipeline Consultation Zone Ordinance,” encourages affected local governments to adopt by ordinance pipeline safety consultation zones. Such ordinances could require property developers/owners in either rural or urban areas to review their proposed projects with pipeline operators before any application for a land use or development permit within a consultation zone is approved.

Brookings County, S.D., incorporated a “Transmission Pipeline Risk Reduction Overlay District” into its zoning ordinance, using PIPA-recommended practices. Brookings County worked with multiple stakeholders, including two transmission pipeline operators, in establishing the appropriate distances for its consultation and planning zones. PIPA-Recommended Practice BL06, “Implement New Development Planning Areas Around Transmission Pipelines,” discusses the development and use of planning zones. A copy of the Brookings County ordinance and other sample land use ordinances are available at [www.mrsc.org/Subjects/PubSafe/transpipeords.aspx](http://www.mrsc.org/Subjects/PubSafe/transpipeords.aspx).

Property developers/owners are not transmission pipeline experts. Cynthia Quarterman, PHMSA administrator, has said that the PIPA-recommended practices are effective tools for

property developers/owners and community planners who may not be knowledgeable about pipelines. Developers and planners should consult with the pipeline operator to determine whether a proposed land use or development will impact the integrity of a nearby transmission pipeline or the future safety of the public.

### **Recommended Practices for Pipeline Operators**

PHMSA encourages pipeline operators to become aware of and implement the PIPA-recommended practices where appropriate. While these practices are not mandated, they were developed by stakeholder representatives who agreed on the practices using a consensus process similar to that used during the Common Ground study.

Some of the PIPA-recommended practices are intended to be implemented in preparation for future land use and development, and others are to be implemented when specific new land use and development projects are proposed. Here are a few of the 20 recommended practices addressing pipeline operator actions:

- BL08 - Manage Land Records;
- BL13 - Prevent and Manage Right-of-Way Encroachment;
- BL16 - Halt Dangerous Excavation Activities Near Transmission Pipelines;
- BL17 - Map Abandoned Pipelines; and
- ND08 - Collaborate on Alternate Use and Development of Transmission Pipeline Right-of-Way.

Operators are urged to become familiar with all of the PIPA-recommended practices to foster an understanding of the practices and enable communication with other stakeholders that may be implementing them. For more information, to see all of the PIPA-recommended practices, and to see and download the entire PIPA report, go to [www.PIPA-Info.com](http://www.PIPA-Info.com).

*Editor's Note: For more details on the PIPA-recommended practices initiative, see "The 'Right' Way to Use Land" in the May 2009 American Gas.*

*JULIE HALLIDAY is senior program manager for the U.S. Department of Transportation's Office of Pipeline Safety.*

**CREDIT FOR ALL ART:** ARTWORK AND PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED BY U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION'S OFFICE OF PIPELINE SAFETY

### **SIDEBAR:**

#### **Promote Proper Planning**

