

# Pipeline safety guidelines expected soon: Measures aimed at safe development near lines

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Chris Killian | Special to the Kalamazoo Gazette

**NEW ORLEANS** — A framework for keeping communities nationwide safe from pipelines that carry hazardous liquids and gases is to be released soon.

Guidelines for safe development near pipelines, being crafted by the Pipelines and Informed Planning Alliance (PIPA), a collaboration of pipeline operators, local government planners and real estate developers, are expected to be made public in the coming months, said Sam Hall, program manager for the federal Pipelines and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, which regulates the nation's 2.3 million miles of pipeline infrastructure.

"This is about safe development of areas close to pipelines," Hall said Thursday at the Pipeline Safety Trust's 5th annual national pipeline safety conference in New Orleans. "We need to protect communities and pipelines."

The conference hosted by the nonprofit pipeline watchdog group, attended by federal pipeline regulators, industry officials and private citizens, comes after a summer of high-profile pipeline disasters, including the **Enbridge Energy Partners LLP pipeline rupture near Marshall that sent more than 1 million gallons of crude oil into the Kalamazoo River** and the Pacific Gas & Electric natural gas pipeline explosion in San Bruno, Calif., which killed eight people.

Under the PIPA framework, if a developer or homeowner was planning to perform construction within 660 feet of a hazardous gas pipeline or 660 feet to 1,000 feet of a hazardous liquids pipelines, a mandatory consultation with the pipeline operator would be required to ensure that any potential safety issues are hashed-out before construction equipment begins digging.

The framework is important because even though pipeline accidents involving excavation work are few, their impacts are huge, said Peter Lidiak, director of the pipeline segment of the American Petroleum Institute, a Washington, DC firm that lobbies for the petroleum industry.

From 1999 to 2008, just 7 percent of all hazardous liquids pipeline accidents were from construction equipment cutting, denting or otherwise damaging a pipeline, he said. But during that same period, 61 percent of all fatalities and 40 percent of all injuries from hazardous liquids pipeline accidents were the result of excavation activities.

The city of Austin, Texas has already put in place its own pipeline safety ordinance and PHMSA officials said other municipalities would be wise to follow suit, using the PIPA framework.

At issue is how to accommodate for safe development in formerly rural areas where pipelines have been buried for decades but where sprawl now threatens to expose the area to the potential risks of a pipeline accident, said Chuck Lesniak, of Austin's Watershed Protection and Development Review Department.

The ordinance prohibits development of hospitals, schools, daycare facilities and other sensitive-use structures near a pipeline 8-inches or greater in diameter. Low-risk uses are encouraged on land near pipelines, with the city requiring newly constructed buildings close to pipelines to have non-flammable building material in their walls or have their parking located above the pipeline instead of the building itself. In addition, a home cannot be built on a lot if it is less than 1 acre and has a pipeline running through it.

The rules are all in place to be proactive in keeping the community safe, Lesniak said. "When you protect the pipeline, you protect the people," he said.

"Most people don't think about pipelines until something happens," said Carl Weimer, executive director of the Pipeline Safety Trust. "They say, 'We had no idea.' It's an indication that we have a ways to go on public awareness."

The Enbridge pipeline 6B that runs 286 miles from Griffith, Ind. to Sarnia, Ontario, has been buried in Southwest Michigan for 41 years, but many people near the pipeline didn't know of its existence.

Federal regulations say operators must make residents and businesses near their pipelines aware of their presence, but the industry follows the rule half-heartedly, Weimer said.

For example, the company that operated a liquid propane pipeline that exploded in Clarke County, Mississippi in 2007, killing two people, never let residents there know the pipeline was buried beneath them, PHMSA officials said.

"They shouldn't just be checking a box, but really digging deep to let people know what's going on beneath them," Weimer said.

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