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SAFETY**States want stricter rules on gas distribution pipelines**

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Published: Tuesday, August 15, 2017



In this May 2014 photo, rain clouds blanket a natural gas well pad operated by Cabot Oil and Gas Co. in northern Pennsylvania. Blake Sobczak/E&E News

State pipeline officials have recommended stricter federal rules for replacing high-risk gas distribution pipelines.

They also want faster action to deal with leaking gas pipelines, saying they should not be "accepted as normal operating conditions," according to a report to Congress from the U.S. Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration.

"Many called for more prescriptive federal and state regulations or policies regarding pipeline replacement," the [report](#) stated.

PHMSA did not endorse the stricter rules in its recommendations to Congress in a report earlier this month on pipeline leaks. It said additional study is necessary to determine if more regulation would enhance safety.

The country has about 2.2 million miles of gas distribution pipelines, which comprise 81 percent of all gas and hazardous liquid pipelines.

The American Gas Association (AGA), in a statement to E&E News, said "it is unclear how a federal regulation that requires more frequent inspection would improve pipeline safety."

AGA noted that the PHMSA report found no barriers from state policies to replacing high-risk pipelines. The group's member companies point to permitting delays, higher material and labor costs, and availability of qualified workers as factors delaying replacement of such lines.

The survey and report were ordered by Congress in a 2016 pipeline law. Forty-eight states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico responded and 44 percent offered suggestions. Hawaii and Alaska do not participate in PHMSA's pipeline safety program. The study was done in collaboration with the National Association of State Pipeline Safety Representatives.

The state recommendations were distilled by PHMSA officials from the responses of 22 states or state-level entities who provided suggestions about dealing with pipeline leaks. The agency's report did not say which states recommended stricter rules.

Federal regulations require leaking pipelines to be repaired immediately, call for the "immediate repair" of hazardous leaks or continuous work until they're no longer hazardous. But repairs of nonhazardous leaks can often be delayed.

In 2015 there was an average of 50 unrepaired leaks outstanding for each 1,000 miles of gas distribution pipeline, according to operator data reported to PHMSA.

The survey also indicated 48 percent of states do not have regulations addressing the repair of leaks on natural gas distribution pipelines.

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