
 THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE ENERGY SECTOR

PIPELINES
Change across the flowchart at PHMSA

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COLUMBUS, Ohio — The nation's pipeline regulator is undergoing big personnel change up and down the flowchart, a top career official said yesterday.



Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration nominee Howard Elliott. Elliott/LinkedIn

"Our world has changed dramatically in the past year," Linda Daugherty, deputy associate administrator for the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, told state pipeline officials at a conference here. "Now is a time for innovation."

A confirmation hearing has been scheduled for today for Howard "Skip" Elliott, the rail executive President Trump picked to lead the agency as administrator ([E&E Daily](#), Sept. 25).

But the change goes deeper, Daugherty said.

Three of five regional director positions are vacant, she said, as is the other deputy associate administrator position. Four top career officials and three political appointees are new in their jobs.

Beyond that, the agency has doubled the number of inspectors in the past two years to roughly 200.

And the agency recently stood up a new accident investigation division based in Oklahoma City.

That's on top of the change spurred by the transition in presidential administrations and pipeline protests, she said.

Speaking to the national meeting of the National Association of Pipeline Safety Representatives here in Columbus, Daugherty read through executive orders and memos highlighting words such as "accelerated" and "streamlining."

"You getting a theme here?" she quipped.

She noted that Trump has issued two executive orders on pipelines. She said she didn't recall a president issuing two such orders on pipelines.

"This is about changing our regulations," she said. "Making them less burdensome. Making the focus on safety."

The agency plans to begin soliciting opinions on how it ranks the density of the areas where pipelines are built. The agency uses two ranking systems now and is working on an "advanced notice of proposed rulemaking" to formally gather information on whether to make changes.

She noted that more pipelines mean more protests, referencing debates about the Keystone XL and Dakota Access lines.

"There is a huge pushback on pipelines," Daugherty said. "There are a few people who were against all pipelines, they're a minority, but they can do some damage."

Also at the conference, Robert Hall of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) told the group his agency is concerned about the anti-regulatory mood in the federal government.

He said other branches of the Department of Transportation have told NTSB they want to stop working on safety recommendations made by the board.

"That's something that concerns us," said Hall, director of railroad, pipeline and hazardous material investigations. "Because we don't make our recommendations lightly."

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