



Monday, October 02, 2017 12:36 PM ET **Extra**

Most states lacking adequate pipe safety excavation damage programs

By [Sarah Smith](#)

The federal pipeline safety regulator has found that at least half of [state pipeline safety programs](#) need to do more to reduce the frequency of [excavation damage](#) to underground infrastructure.

The U.S. Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, or PHMSA, recently evaluated all 50 states' excavation damage prevention programs, along with the programs in Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico, and found that only 24 of those programs were adequate. Twenty-six were deemed inadequate, and North Carolina and D.C. are contesting their reviews.

Having an [inadequate](#) program could jeopardize a state's access to federal funding. State pipeline safety programs work as partners with the federal government and can receive up to 80% of their program costs for enforcing federal standards.

Each state has five years to meet minimum adequacy criteria for excavation damage prevention or potentially lose up to 4% of its funding, but Annmarie Robertson, PHMSA's damage prevention program manager, said PHMSA is not inclined to pull funding.

"We really want to work with the states to get them where we want them to be, and the good news is it's going in the right direction," Robertson said at the National Association of Pipeline Safety Representatives' annual meeting in Columbus, Ohio. "We want all states to receive full funding."

Excavation damage caused 15.3% of pipeline incidents over 1997-2016, resulting in 98 deaths, 373 injuries and \$512.4 million in damage. No other single incident cause category claimed more lives, according to PHMSA data. Over that time frame, excavation damage was more prevalent within gas distribution systems, accounting for 35.8% of incidents.

Excavation damage can occur when construction workers, contractors, farm workers or other people doing digging work strike a buried pipeline. There are so-called One Call systems in place that require excavators request location information for underground infrastructure, but breakdowns in this process can lead to damage.

Some state pipeline safety program managers are limited in their enforcement abilities because of state statutes over which the program managers have no control. PHMSA officials have sent letters to state commissioners and other leadership about excavation damage prevention, with the goal of influencing broader state policies regarding excavation damage program management.

"Many states have been working to pass legislation, to do rulemakings, [make] programmatic changes, and we do anticipate several states to move to 'adequate' [in the next round of evaluations]," Robertson said Sept. 26.

Copyright © 2017, S&P Global Market Intelligence
Usage of this product is governed by the License Agreement.

S&P Global Market Intelligence, 55 Water Street, New York, NY 10041