

## Pipeline safety leadership exodus under Trump raises concerns for stakeholders

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The impending departure of several senior leaders at the US pipeline safety regulator has raised concerns among industry, government and public stakeholder groups.

The leaders of four out of eight offices within the US Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) have taken voluntary resignation offers from the federal Office of Personnel Management, Bloomberg News reported. The departures include the longtime heads of PHMSA's national programs to oversee the safe transportation of natural gas, oil and other hazardous materials through 3.4 million miles of pipelines and other transportation modes.

The departures come as PHMSA [continues to clear a backlog of rulemaking mandates](#) from Congress. PHMSA, long viewed as [chronically understaffed](#), has struggled to finalize rules, many of which are meant to prevent a repeat of catastrophic pipeline incidents over the past 15 years.

This work overlaps with the Trump administration's rapid, sweeping effort to shrink the federal government. The effort has been overseen by Tesla CEO Elon Musk, who has alleged widespread fraud, waste and abuse in the federal workforce. The administration has offered buyouts, fired probationary workers, and sought a reduction in force across federal agencies.

PHMSA did not confirm or deny Bloomberg's Feb. 27 report, which cited a Feb. 21 memo from Acting PHMSA Administrator Ben Kochman.

"PHMSA is proud of the work it does to protect the public from the transportation of energy and other hazardous materials, and that mission has not changed," the agency told Platts in a March 3 email. Platts is part of S&P Global Commodity Insights.

### 'Highly technical' industry with 'complex regulation'

Yet the Interstate Natural Gas Association of America (INGAA) said the simultaneous departure of many senior leaders was concerning.

"Our industry is highly technical with complex regulations and therefore we believe there is value in long-standing federal career staff who have developed technical industry knowledge and expertise over time, along with relationships with industry, the public and trade associations," INGAA President and CEO Amy Andryszak told Platts in a Feb. 28 email.

Andryszak said INGAA is confident that PHMSA's political leadership understands and appreciates how important the senior leadership roles are to pipeline safety and will "work quickly to find competent replacements."

The Pipeline Safety Trust, which represents the public in pipeline safety forums and rulemakings, noted that PHMSA "has a team of dedicated safety professionals" still in place, but also expressed concern.

"I have to think that losing that many years of experience in [the] leadership team will have an effect on the agency's work, at least in the short term," Pipeline Safety Trust Executive Director Bill Caram told Platts in a Feb. 28 email.

### Safety program leaders to depart

The impact of the departure of Alan Mayberry, associate administrator for PHMSA's Office of Pipeline Safety (OPS), "cannot be understated," said David Chislea, chair of the National Association of Pipeline Safety Representatives (NAPSR), which represents state pipeline safety personnel.

Mayberry has led OPS since 2016 and held leadership positions within the office prior to his appointment. As part of this work, he oversaw response to major pipeline incidents that [marked the 2010s](#) and set in motion many of PHMSA's [most substantial rulemakings](#). OPS oversees development of pipeline safety regulations and employs 232 federal inspection and enforcement staff and 450 state inspectors.

"Alan Mayberry was a strong advocate for pipeline safety, including supporting the states in carrying out pipeline safety programs that help ensure the safety of the nation's pipeline infrastructure," Chislea told Platts in a Feb. 28 email.

NAPSR was nevertheless confident that PHMSA would continue inspections and enforcement and maintain support for state programs, Chislea said. He noted that transitions historically occur with changes in administration, and said NAPSR looked forward to working with a new OPS leader as it monitored the current situation.

The departures also include William Schoonover, associate administrator for Hazardous Materials Safety since 2016 and acting associate administrator of the

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Office of Planning and Analytics.

At the Office of Hazardous Materials Safety, Schoonover oversees more than 230 workers. He previously led PHMSA's outreach and enforcement oversight program as a deputy associate administrator and served in the Federal Railroad Administration for more than two decades.

### **More senior leadership changes**

PHMSA's former top lawyer, Vasiliki Tsaganos, will also reportedly depart. Tsaganos is deputy chief counsel and served as acting chief counsel until the Trump administration named Keith Coyle to the job.

Coyle was an attorney-adviser at PHMSA and a legislative aide to former US Rep. Kevin Brady (R-Texas) before moving into the private sector. There, at law firm Babst Calland, he led the legal team that [successfully argued](#) to vacate the applicability of PHMSA's automatic valve shut-off rule for gas gathering lines in 2023.

Also departing are PHMSA Executive Director Howard "Mac" McMillan, Associate Administrator for Administration Audrey Farley and senior advisers Richard Chávez and Lisa Farmer, Bloomberg reported.

Trump has nominated Paul Roberti, PHMSA chief counsel during the president's first term, to lead the administration. The administration named Kochman, former director of Pipeline Safety Policy at INGAA, as deputy administrator.

PHMSA did not respond to a question regarding reductions in its general workforce since Trump took office. A [bipartisan pipeline safety](#) bill that advanced in the 118th Congress included \$23.8 million for recruitment and retention at PHMSA and authorized the administration to hire up to 30 full-time staff focused on fulfilling rulemaking mandates.

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