



Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

Sam Graves
Chairman

Nick Christensen, Staff Director

Rick Larsen
Ranking Member

Katherine W. Dedrick, Democratic Staff Director

July 22, 2025

Ben Kochman
Deputy Administrator
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Deputy Administrator Kochman:

We write to express concern about the impact of recent actions at the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) on pipeline safety. Taken together, these actions reduce safety oversight of an industry transporting products that have deadly and devastating consequences on human life, health and the environment in the event of an accident. Since January 20:

1. Enforcement of pipeline safety violations has dramatically decreased. The first six months of the Trump Administration has seen the lowest level of pipeline safety enforcement in decades. March 2025 was the first time in PHMSA's 20-year history that the agency did not initiate any new pipeline safety enforcement actions. In February, there was only one enforcement action; April had only four. After *The Washington Post* highlighted this drop in enforcement in May,¹ enforcements jumped to 29 cases, but 11 of these "enforcements" were warnings that were closed on the same day. In June, there was a precipitous 80 percent drop in the number of safety enforcement cases initiated—only six, with two of those being warnings that were again closed on the same day.
2. Four of the five most senior career executives left the agency including the Executive Director, Deputy Chief Counsel, and Associate Administrators for Pipeline Safety and Hazardous Materials Safety—each with decades of management and safety oversight experience. With the exception of the Chief Financial Officer, each most senior level career executive position remains filled by a person in an acting role.
3. PHMSA proposed four rulemakings to weaken repair and inspection requirements of pipeline facilities or to exempt certain facilities from PHMSA safety oversight altogether.

¹ Joselow, Maxine, et al. "Trump orders the government to stop enforcing rules he doesn't like: Critics say the administration is breaking the law and sidestepping the rulemaking process that presidents of both parties have routinely followed." *Washington Post*, May 18, 2025. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2025/05/18/trump-enforcement-halt-regulations-laws/>

The law requires the agency to prioritize protecting people and the environment in the last pipeline safety authorization signed into law during President Trump's first term in December 2020.²

4. Pipeline operators are currently permitted to operate lines that are over 50 years old without test records for maximum allowable pressure despite a Congressional mandate from 2011 on PHMSA to issue regulations for previously untested pipelines, enacted after 8 people died and 10 were seriously injured from a Pacific Gas & Electric pipeline explosion in San Bruno, California. Please report back to the Committee with the pipeline mileage, by Congressional District, on which maximum allowable operating pressure testing records do not exist.
5. Your agency has failed to post the required monthly updates on the PHMSA website regarding regulatory actions the agency is pursuing.³ The purpose of these transparency requirements is to keep the public and Congress informed of the agency's rulemaking progress on incomplete mandatory pipeline safety rules. The chart was last updated on January 17th. Please update the chart and continue to provide updates on the regulatory actions you are pursuing.
6. PHMSA continues to withhold from the Pipeline Safety Trust (PST) a Technical Assistance Grant. PST's outside financial auditors have not identified any findings yet PHMSA recently initiated a compliance review of PST. We urge you to release PST's grant. PHMSA should be using PST's expertise to promote safety rather than sideline an organization that works to hold the pipeline industry and regulators accountable to the public.

Since the tragic Olympic pipeline disaster in Bellingham, Washington on June 10, 1999 that killed two young boys and a young man, pipeline safety has been a top priority in Congress. Unfortunately, 2023 and 2024 were the deadliest two years due to pipeline accidents in more than a decade and the number of pipeline safety incidents in 2024 was higher than 2023. PHMSA must start taking its responsibilities under the law more seriously in order to protect the general public and reverse this troubling trend.

Please respond by August 15, 2025 with the requested information and the agency's plans with respect to the inquiries above.

Sincerely,



Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure



Dina Titus
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines,
and Hazardous Materials

² P.L. 116-260, Division R, Protecting our Infrastructure of Pipelines and Enhancing Safety Act of 2020 (PIPES 2020). See Sections 109 on pipeline operating status, 113 on leak detection and repair, and 114 for inspection and maintenance plans.

³ PIPES 2020, Sec. 106.