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DOT's Pipeline Safety Agency Closes Record Number of Enforcement Orders for Three Consecutive Years

WASHINGTON –The U.S. Department of Transportation today announced it has resolved a record number of enforcement cases against pipeline operators over the last three years as part of the Obama Administration's push to ensure pipeline operators fully comply with federal safety regulations.

“Safety is our top priority, and through better enforcement, we can help prevent accidents before they occur,” said Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. “Better enforcement protects people and the environment and holds operators accountable for the safety of the nation's pipeline transportation network.”

As part of Secretary LaHood's Call to Action plan to improve pipeline safety, the Department's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) issued 102 Final Orders in 2011, closing its highest number of enforcement cases in a single year following the passage of the Pipeline Safety Improvement Act of 2002. Since 2008, PHMSA has issued 281 Final Orders to pipeline operators, constituting almost 40 percent of all Final Orders issued by the agency since 2002.

PHMSA issues Final Orders to pipeline operators for violations of federal pipeline safety regulations. Final Orders are resolutions to pending enforcement cases and are issued once the agency verifies that all corrective actions are successfully completed and any associated fines are paid.

The increased enforcement is a direct result of improved internal tracking procedures and rigorous investigations and inspections of pipeline facilities by PHMSA field personnel.

“These enforcement efforts are crucial to help improve America's pipeline infrastructure for our communities,” said PHMSA Administrator Cynthia Quarterman. “We will

continue to conduct rigorous inspections to meet even more safety achievements in the future.”

President Obama recently signed the Pipeline Safety, Regulatory Certainty, and Job Creation Act of 2011. The legislation doubles the maximum civil penalty amount PHMSA can issue to pipeline operators for violating pipeline safety regulations from \$100,000 to \$200,000 for each violation, and from \$1,000,000 to \$2,000,000 for a related series of violations. The law also increases staff by 10 for PHMSA’s pipeline inspection and enforcement personnel.

For more information on the U.S. DOT’s efforts to improve pipeline safety and awareness, visit: <http://opsweb.phmsa.dot.gov/pipelineforum/>.

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) develops and enforces regulations for the safe, reliable, and environmentally sound operation of the nation's 2.5 million mile pipeline transportation system and the nearly 1 million daily shipments of hazardous materials by land, sea, and air. PHMSA is one of ten agencies within the U.S. Department of Transportation.

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