

DOT Issues New Pipeline Safety Guidelines, Announces Grant Opportunity

by Carolyn Berndt

Last month, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) released new safety guidelines to help local governments, developers and community planners better protect areas near transmission pipelines. The guidelines, developed by the Pipelines and Informed Planning Alliance (PIPA), mark the first time a set of recommendations for development near existing transmission pipelines has been issued.

The report, "Partnering to Further Enhance Pipeline Safety in Communities through Risk-Informed Land Use Planning," offers nearly 50 recommended practices for local communities, developers and pipeline operators to use to help reduce the safety risks that result from growth of communities near pipelines. The recommendations offer options on how land-use planning and development decisions can help protect existing pipeline infrastructure and growing communities.

The report also provides recommendations on how communities can gather information about local transmission pipelines and how local planners, developers and pipeline operators should communicate during all phases of new development to understand pipeline risks, and how to minimize pipeline excavation damages during site preparation and construction.

Two of the key recommendations for local governments pertain to consultation zones and planning areas. The report recommends that local governments "define a 'consultation zone' to provide a mechanism for communication between property developers/owners and operators of nearby transmission pipelines when new land uses and property developments are being planned." Additionally, the report recommends that local governments "consider implementing 'planning areas' to enhance safety when new land use and property development is planned near transmission pipelines."

Austin Mayor Lee Leffingwell served as NLC's representative to the PIPA steering group tasked with developing the report. "I'm proud of the City of Austin's contribution to this effort. These new guidelines will greatly contribute to the safety of residential areas as they develop around existing pipelines," said Leffingwell.

When transmission pipelines are located in proximity to where people live, work, shop or travel, pipeline safety concerns must be incorporated into every level of the decision-making and land development approval process.

"The best practices developed by the PIPA Committee will provide valuable tools and guidance for local officials as they try to balance economic development, public safety and protection of important energy infrastructure," said Chuck Lesniak, environmental policy program manager with the Austin Watershed Protection Department, who provided technical assistance and staff support for Mayor Leffingwell.

NLC Article (<http://www.nlc.org/articles/articleItems/NCW011011/pipelinesafety.aspx>)

To read the PIPA report, visit <http://primis.phmsa.dot.gov/comm/LandUsePlanning.htm>

Technical Assistance Grant

The DOT Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Administration (PHMSA) is accepting applications for Technical Assistance Grants through February 28, 2011. The Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) program is designed to provide funding to communities and non-profit groups for engineering or other scientific analysis of natural gas and hazardous liquid pipeline safety issues. The funding can also be used to help promote public participation in official proceedings pertaining to pipeline safety. Eligible activities could include implementation of PIPA recommended practices, conducting studies of pipeline safety issues at the local level, increasing public awareness of pipeline safety issues, etc.

The maximum award for a single grantee is \$50,000 and a total of \$1,000,000 is available. To learn more about the TAG program, visit <http://primis.phmsa.dot.gov/comm/DamagePreventionGrantsToStates.htm>. For more information on the grant opportunity, contact Sam Hall, TAG program manager for PHMSA, at sam.hall@dot.gov.