

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) of the U.S. Department of Transportation is charged with ensuring the safe and reliable transport of hazardous liquid and gas commodities through America's vast network of pipelines. Raising the safety bar to protect pipelines, promoting continued operational efficiency and reducing public and environmental risks are top priorities for PHMSA.

The Pipeline Inspection, Protection, Enforcement and Safety (PIPES) Act of 2006 provided PHMSA with valuable resources to strengthen its pipeline safety program. The PIPES Act reinforces PHMSA's long term strategy of using State damage prevention programs to play a crucial role in reducing the risk of pipeline incidents. Experience has shown that fair and consistent enforcement of damage prevention laws leads to less frequent pipeline damage.

Recognizing the effectiveness of stakeholder cooperation at the State level, PHMSA implemented a new grant program to help States improve damage prevention programs. Under the PIPES Act, States are eligible for new damage prevention grants if the State implements nine elements of an effective damage prevention program, many of which correspond directly with Common Ground Alliance (CGA) Best Practices (see next column).

Best Practices and Regional Partners

Damage prevention best practices were first published in PHMSA's Common Ground Study in 1999. Since then, PHMSA has worked with an enterprise of damage prevention stakeholders through the CGA to revise and create new best practices. The CGA most recently published Version 4.0 of the best practices, which can be accessed on www.commongroundalliance.com.

Improvements in State damage prevention programs will enhance safety for both excavators and the public. Input and support from all stakeholders will be crucial to State agencies as they plan changes to damage prevention programs.

Excavators are encouraged to seek opportunities to partner with facility owners, one call centers, and regulators to assume their share of responsibility for pipeline safety. One way to collaborate in damage prevention is to join a CGA Regional Partner. These regional organizations consist of stakeholders working together to implement best practices to prevent underground damage. A listing of Regional Partners can be found on the CGA web site.

Know What to Do When Things Go Wrong

One of the leading causes of injuries and deaths associated with underground utility damage is digging. Fortunately, this problem is almost entirely preventable. Stakeholders need to be aware of the appropriate steps to take if damage occurs.

The CGA Excavation Best Practices state that an excavator who damages any underground facility must notify the owner to ensure the facility is properly repaired and prepared for reburial.

The PIPES Act **REQUIRES**
excavators to

CALL 911
if excavation damage
causes a pipeline leak.

The Best Practices go on to say that if damage results in the release of flammable gas or liquid from a pipeline, the excavator should call 911 in addition to notifying the owner. The PIPES Act REQUIRES excavators to call 911 if excavation damage causes a pipeline leak.

Community emergency responders and pipeline operator employees often work together to ensure public safety subsequent to a pipeline leak. Excavators should always call emergency responders by dialing 911 before attempting to mitigate the consequences of a pipeline leak on their own

Damage Prevention Programs Are Key

In order for a state damage prevention program to qualify for PIPES grant money, it must include, or be making substantial progress toward including, the following components.

Nine Essential Elements of a Damage Prevention Program:

1. Enhanced communications between operators and excavators
2. Fostering support and partnership of all stakeholders
3. Operator's use of performance measures
4. Partnership in employee training
5. Partnership in public education
6. Dispute resolution process
7. Fair and consistent enforcement of the law
8. Use of technology to improve process
9. Analysis of data to continually evaluate/improve program

From PIPES Act of 2006 ■



DIGGING DEEPER: More information on this subject

- ops.dot.gov
- <http://primis.phmsa.dot.gov>
- CommonGroundAlliance.com