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U.S. Department of Transportation Proposes to Expand the Use of Excess Flow Valves in Natural Gas Distribution Pipelines

WASHINGTON – As part of U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood’s national pipeline safety initiative to prevent potentially catastrophic incidents, the Department’s Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) today announced it will begin taking comments from the public on whether it should expand the use of excess flow-valves beyond single-family homes and into larger residential and commercial areas. An excess flow valve is a device designed to limit the impact of a potential leak or explosion by restricting the flow of natural gas if a line is broken or damaged.

“The safety of the American people is my top priority,” said U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. “I am committed to working with pipeline operators, utilities, local governments and members of the public to improve our nation’s pipeline infrastructure and ensure it remains safe, well-maintained, and fit for service.”

Earlier this year, Secretary LaHood announced a pipeline safety action plan to immediately begin addressing concerns about the state of the nation’s aging pipeline infrastructure. He also called upon U.S. pipeline owners and operators to conduct a comprehensive review of their oil and gas pipelines to identify areas of high risk and accelerate critical repair and replacement work.

Secretary LaHood also proposed federal legislation to strengthen oversight on pipeline safety. The legislation would increase the maximum civil penalties for pipeline violations and would authorize the Department to close regulatory loopholes, strengthen risk management requirements, and improve data reporting to help identify potential pipeline safety risks earlier.

PHMSA is seeking comments on current technical standards and guidance related to the manufacturing and testing of excess flow valves and industry standards governing their performance and reliability.

Comments received from the Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) will also assist the agency in determining what further actions DOT may take in response to a National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) recommendation to PHMSA to install excess flow valves in all new and renewed gas service lines, regardless of the customer's classification. The recommendation, P-01-02, resulted from the NTSB's investigation of a 1998 natural gas explosion at a single family residence in South Riding, Virginia in which one person was killed and three others were injured.

“Natural gas pipeline leaks and subsequent ignition can seriously threaten public safety and cause significant property damage,” said PHMSA Administrator Cynthia Quarterman. “We know these valves will not prevent distribution pipeline accidents, but their use may considerably help reduce the amount of gas released and may reduce safety risks to the surrounding public.”

The public comment period for this notice ends 60 days after the date of publication in the *Federal Register*. The notice is now on public display and can be viewed at http://www.ofr.gov/OFRUpload/OFRData/2011-30330_PI.pdf.

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