

INSIGHTS

Advisory Committee Meetings May Add Insight to Policy Priorities

December 7, 2017

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Oil and gas pipeline technical advisory committee [meetings](#) will be held on December 13-15 in Washington, D.C. The agenda covers updates on PHMSA pipeline safety programs and policy issues. The oil and gas peer review committees, comprised of federal and state agency representatives, industry and the public, will discuss a variety of topics within that agenda, related to inspection and enforcement, updates regarding pending rulemakings and regulatory reform initiatives, underground gas storage, and more. This is one of the first opportunities to hear from the Agency's new leadership (especially recently appointed PHMSA Administrator Skip Elliott and Deputy Administrator Drue Pearce). The meetings should provide valuable insight to the priorities and policy initiatives under the Trump Administration affecting oil and gas critical energy infrastructure.

The Gas Pipeline Advisory Committee (GPAC) and the Liquid Pipeline Advisory Committee (LPAC) are statutorily mandated advisory committees under the Pipeline Safety Act (49 U.S.C. § 60115) and the Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App. 2). They advise PHMSA on the technical feasibility, reasonableness, cost-effectiveness, and practicability of proposed pipeline safety standards and associated risk assessments. PHMSA is not required to accept the recommendations of the committees, but where the conclusions of the majority of the committee are not accepted, the Agency's rationale for any rejection must be addressed in the preamble of a final rule.

The GPAC and LPAC will meet in a joint session on December 13, 2017, to [discuss](#) an overview of Agency developments presented by newly sworn-in PHMSA Administrator Skip Elliott. In addition, various agency representatives are expected to present targeted briefings on the following: regulatory reform and pending rulemakings, enforcement (including a session focused on excavation damage), pipeline inspections, underground natural gas storage, Safety Management Systems, research and development, and the Voluntary Information Sharing working group. Each briefing includes time allotted for questions from committee members and the public.

GPAC will meet separately on December 14 and 15 to consider aspects of the proposed gas mega rule ("[Safety of Gas Transmission and Gathering Pipelines](#)") and the associated regulatory analysis, as a continuation for the meetings that were last held in [May](#). The topics for discussion will include substantiation of operating pressure material documentation and integrity verification proposals, as well as proposed revisions to integrity assessment requirements if time allows (*i.e.*, inline inspection, direct assessment, Guided Wave Ultrasonic

Technology, etc.). Other topics will be tabled for a separate meeting in 2018, including proposals specific to gathering lines, reporting, integrity assessments outside of high consequence areas, repair criteria, etc. This proposed rulemaking prompted substantial comment from operators and industry groups, including requests that the Agency withdraw certain sweeping proposals in the recent [request for comments](#) on [regulatory reform](#). PHMSA's detailed [presentation](#) on the topics to be discussed at this meeting was recently made available and includes the Agency's response and proposed resolution to certain comments.

Since the transition in early 2017 to a new Administration, PHMSA has undergone numerous staffing and budget changes, and faces the challenge of responding to various Executive Orders which effectively required the Agency to reevaluate pending rulemakings (some of which were mandated by Congress) and press for deregulation. Against this backdrop, the Agency still has numerous statutory mandates to comply with under Pipeline Safety Act amendments, as well as GAO and NTSB recommendations. The advisory committee meetings are likely to inform industry and other stakeholders on the [direction](#) of this Agency under its newly appointed leadership.