

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2013 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**

Senate Bill 864  
Finance

(Senator Zirkin)

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**Public Safety - Gas Pipelines - Gas Leak Response**

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This bill requires the Public Service Commission (PSC) to adopt regulations to create three specified classes of natural gas leaks and to require a gas transmission company to remediate each class of leak within a specified timeframe. The regulations must also establish a penalty for failing to comply with the repair schedule and must establish additional requirements for inspection, maintenance, and related matters that PSC considers necessary to implement the bill. Gas transmission companies must respond to, initially investigate, and classify the leak, if applicable, within one hour of receiving a report of a suspected gas leak. After a lapse of the one-hour response period, PSC must impose a penalty of \$100,000 for every thirty minutes of failure by the gas transmission company to respond to a report of a suspected leak.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** PSC can implement the bill with existing budgeted resources. The bill's penalty provision is not expected to materially affect State finances.

**Local Effect:** Minimal or none.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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**Analysis**

**Bill Summary:** For purposes of the bill, "gas" means natural gas, flammable gas, or toxic or corrosive gas, and a "gas pipeline" means an *intrastate* transmission line or any portion of an interstate transmission line located within the State that (1) transports gas from a gathering line or storage facility to a distribution center, storage facility, or large-volume customer that is not downstream from a distribution center; (2) operates at a

specified hoop stress; or (3) transports gas within a storage field. A “gas transmission company” means a person who owns or operates a gas pipeline regulated under the bill, and does not include a person that is primarily in the business of local gas distribution.

PSC has jurisdiction over the bill and any regulations adopted under it to the same extent that it has over any provision of its own law, Division I of the Public Utilities Article.

**Current Law:** The Federal Natural Gas Pipeline Safety Act of 1968 requires the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation to establish minimum federal safety standards for the transportation of gas and for pipeline facilities.

The Secretary’s authority to prescribe and enforce gas pipeline safety standards does not apply to *intrastate* pipeline transportation if a state agency regulates the safety standards and practices applicable to *intrastate* pipeline transportation and submits certification to the Secretary each year meeting specified criteria. PSC has adopted the applicable federal safety standards established under the Act and has established the required inspection, documentation, and enforcement program outlined in the Act.

The Act requires the establishment of minimum federal safety standards and provides that any state agency may adopt additional or more stringent regulations that are not incompatible with the minimum federal standards. Those standards may affect the design, installation, inspection, testing, construction, extension, operation, replacement, and maintenance of pipeline facilities. Standards affecting the design, installation, construction, initial inspection, and initial testing do not apply to preexisting pipeline facilities.

PSC, under certification from U.S. Department of Transportation’s Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), assumes safety responsibility with respect to *intrastate* gas facilities, and has statutory authority to establish and enforce safety standards for *intrastate* gas facilities. PSC regulations regarding gas safety require each gas company to exercise reasonable care to reduce the hazards of gas distribution and transmission.

Each gas company must adopt and execute a safety program, odorize the gas, and bury pipe according to specified standards. The gas company must also respond promptly to all reports of gas leaks and investigate the reports in accordance with the Gas Piping and Technology Committee standards, which include a system for classifying gas leaks similar to that proposed by the bill. For additional information related to the federal and state regulation of pipeline safety, see the **Appendix – Pipeline Regulation and Safety**.

### *Civil and Criminal Penalties*

In addition to any other penalty authorized, PSC may impose a civil penalty of up to \$25,000 against a person who violates specified provisions or an outstanding direction, order, rule, or regulation of PSC. Each day or part of a day the violation continues is a separate offense.

Public service companies that violate PSC provisions relating to safety are subject to a civil penalty of up to \$25,000 per violation for each day that the violation persists. Civil penalties collected by PSC are paid into the general fund. An individual who knowingly aids or abets a public service company in violating PSC rules, orders, and regulations is guilty of a misdemeanor and unless a different punishment is specified, on conviction is subject to a fine of up to \$1,000 for a first offense and up to \$5,000 for a subsequent offense.

A gas company or gas master meter operator that violates any of PSC's standards of safe service or other regulations related to safety is subject to a civil penalty determined by PSC that does not exceed the maximum penalties specified in federal regulations (currently a maximum fine of \$100,000 per day per violation, up to \$1,000,000 for any related series of violations).

**Background:** The bill affects natural gas transmission pipelines – high-pressure pipes designed to move large volumes of natural gas across long distances. Natural gas transmission pipelines are a separate system from hazardous liquids pipelines. In general, natural gas is brought into the State through the interstate transmission system and then allocated as needed through the *intrastate* natural gas distribution systems of the State's gas companies for customer use. These interstate natural gas transmission pipelines are under the regulatory authority of PHMSA. However, three gas companies operate *intrastate* gas transmission systems that transport natural gas from the interstate transmission system to their franchised distribution systems: Baltimore Gas and Electric Company, Washington Gas Light Company, and Columbia Gas of Maryland.

PSC currently manages two pipeline safety programs, one for natural gas and the other for hazardous liquids pipelines. The natural gas pipeline safety program includes the inspection of 77 jurisdictional natural gas and propane pipeline operators. The hazardous liquids pipeline safety program includes the inspection of one jurisdictional hazardous liquids pipeline operator.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** HB 1118 (Delegate Stein, *et al.*) - Economic Matters.

**Information Source(s):** Public Service Commission; Maryland Department of the Environment; U.S. Department of Transportation; Anne Arundel, Charles, and Frederick counties; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - March 6, 2013  
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## Appendix – Pipeline Regulation and Safety

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The regulation of pipeline safety occurs at both the federal and state levels. The State’s Public Service Commission (PSC) regulates *intrastate* pipeline safety. PSC may enter and inspect, at reasonable times and in a reasonable manner, the pipeline facilities and the pipeline procedures of those involved with them and books, records, papers, and other documents relevant to determining compliance with regulations. Whenever PSC finds a particular facility to be hazardous to life or property, it is empowered to require the person operating such facility to take the steps necessary to remove such hazards.

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) within the U.S. Department of Transportation is the primary federal agency responsible for ensuring that pipelines are safe, reliable, and environmentally sound. PHMSA oversees the development and implementation of regulations concerning pipeline construction, maintenance and operation, and shares these responsibilities with state regulators. PHMSA comprises two safety divisions, the Office of Pipeline Safety (OPS), and the Office of Hazardous Materials Safety. In overseeing approximately 2.3 million miles of natural gas and hazardous liquid pipelines, OPS:

- administers a national pipeline inspection and enforcement program;
- administers pipeline safety regulatory programs and establishes the regulatory agenda;
- oversees pipeline operator implementation of risk management and risk-based programs;
- develops regulatory policy options and initiatives, and researches, analyzes, and documents social, economic, technological, environmental, safety, and security impacts upon existing and proposed regulatory, legislative, or program activities involving pipeline safety;
- develops and maintains partnerships with other federal, state, and local agencies as well as other stakeholders to address threats to pipeline integrity, service, and reliability and to share responsibility for the safety of communities;
- provides technical and resource assistance for state pipeline safety programs to ensure oversight of *intrastate* pipeline systems at the local level; and
- supports the development and conduct of pipeline safety training programs for federal and state regulatory and compliance staff and the pipeline industry.

According to PHMSA, pipelines are by far the safest method for transporting energy products. However, when pipeline incidents occur, they can present significant risks to the public and the environment. There were 30 “significant incidents” in Maryland from 2002 through 2011, totaling \$12 million in property damage and causing one fatality and 16 injuries.