

Bulletin Alerts Companies to Check Pipelines After Derailments

Fulfilling an NTSB recommendation, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration issued it with a July 31 notice. It stems from a June 2009 Canadian National Railway derailment in Cherry Valley, Ill.

Jul 31, 2012 Occupational Health and Safety

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration has fulfilled an NTSB recommendation by issuing an **advisory bulletin** alerting all pipeline owners and operators to check their pipeline facilities after rail accidents or other events in their right-of-way. The recommendation and the bulletin result from a major derailment in Cherry Valley, Ill. on June 19, 2009, involving a Canadian National Railway freight train.

Part of the train derailed about 8:30 p.m. because heavy rain had washed out the ballast underneath the company's tracks at a grade crossing. Nineteen tank cars containing ethanol derailed, causing a giant fire. A woman died while fleeing from a car that was stopped at the crossing to let the train pass, and nine other people were injured, including her husband and daughter. Monetary damages totaled \$7.9 million, and the railroad subsequently **settled a lawsuit** from the family of the female victim for \$36.2 million.

A total of 35 fire departments and 250 personnel responded to the fire or were part of the mutual aid response. NTSB's **final report** said the railroad's emergency communications were inadequate at the time of the accident, and as a result CN police could not prevent the derailment even though adequate time was available for them to prevent it.

A buried gas pipeline was dented but not breached during the derailment, even though the pipeline was 11 feet below ground -- three times deeper than federal standards required and five times deeper than the rail industry's recommended depth at the time the pipeline was constructed.

The PHMSA bulletin also reminds pipeline owners and operators of the importance of providing pertinent information to rail operators and emergency response officials during an incident, including the presence, depth, and location of pipelines.