

OPENING STATEMENT OF REP. CHRIS CARNEY (D-PA), AS PREPARED

CHAIRMAN
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“Unclogging Pipeline Security: Are the Lines of Responsibility Clear?”

Monday, April 19, 2010

The purpose of this hearing is to examine the management of the nation’s pipeline networks, which transmit oil and gas across the United States and have vital links to critical infrastructure, such as power plants, airports, and military bases. The management and oversight of these systems present unique homeland security challenges, as they are vulnerable to both accidents and terrorist attacks.

The national pipeline system is an extensive mode of transportation. Virtually all the critical pipeline infrastructure is owned or operated by private entities. However, the Federal government is responsible for regulating, securing and ensuring the safety of the national pipeline system.

There are currently:

- 168,900 miles of hazardous liquid pipelines operated by over 200 companies.
- 320,500 miles of natural gas transmission pipelines operated by over 700 companies.
- 2.2 million miles of natural gas distribution pipelines operated by over 1300 companies.

I mention these statistics because I think they demonstrate just how difficult a job it is to secure these pipelines. But there can be zero tolerance for failure in securing these pipelines because of the potential lethality of chemicals and gases they carry.

In 2008, in Plum Borough, Pennsylvania a natural gas explosion killed a man and seriously injured a 4-year-old girl, three houses were destroyed and 11 others were seriously damaged. The National Transportation Safety Board determined that the probable cause of the explosion was excavation damage to the 2-inch natural gas distribution pipeline that stripped the pipe’s protective coating and made the pipe susceptible to corrosion and failure.

In 2005, a pipeline exploded near a home in Moon Township, Pennsylvania causing injuries to two people. This explosion was caused as a result of a gas company worker who ruptured a natural gas line and failed to report it to the proper authorities.

And of course, I am aware of the incident that happened close to here in 2007 involving the release of ammonia after a teenage boy drilled a hole into a pipeline.

Sometimes the damage to a pipeline is accidental and sometimes it is deliberate. In fact, a prison just outside of my district in Scranton, Pennsylvania holds a man who tried to recruit Al-Qaida ‘crews’ to strike at gas pipelines in Alaska, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Wyoming. Luckily he was not successful.

I mention these incidents because clearly they show that we must continue to try to improve the security of our nation’s pipeline infrastructure.

Today, I will be interested in learning if sufficient coordination exists between the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Transportation.

I would also like to learn if the Transportation Security Administration has sufficient capability and funding to deal with its role in pipeline security.

Lastly, I will be interested in hearing from our witnesses if written pipeline regulation is needed. Under the current system, pipeline owners and operators are given guidelines that should be followed; however, since these are merely guidelines, there is no enforcement authority that mandates compliance.

Given the frequency of pipeline-related incidents that occur throughout the country, coupled with the extent of both human and economic loss that could result from these incidents, it may be wise to consider whether the systems should have written regulations.