

May 1, 2024

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Chair, Committee on Commerce, Science and
Transportation
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ted Cruz
Ranking Member, Committee on Commerce,
Science and Transportation
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cantwell and Ranking Member Cruz,

The undersigned organizations represent construction contractors, manufacturers, distributors and other service providers, pipeline operators, labor unions, professionals in surveying, mapping and engineering, and others engaged in construction of underground facilities, and have a vested interest in pipeline safety. These organizations have a vested interest in legislation expected in the Senate Commerce Committee that would reauthorize the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) and the nation's pipeline safety program, and we encourage the committee to introduce and advance legislation in the interest of enacting a final bill into law this year. We appreciate the opportunity to weigh in with you on a few provisions currently under consideration.

State Damage Prevention Programs

The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and Energy and Commerce Committee have approved their respective pipeline safety bills, both of which address enduring problems associated with damages to underground facilities during excavation activity. Damage prevention is a shared responsibility, and ensuring for accurate and timely locating and marking of subsurface facilities prior to excavation is critical to the process. The House legislation includes language that would take significant steps toward improved mapping, locating and marking underground facilities, and ensuring all stakeholders are required to participate in the 811 process.

Specifically, the language would require states to demonstrate that they have adopted or can show progress toward adopting several leading practices in their damage prevention programs as part of the criteria considered when states apply for PHMSA damage prevention grant dollars. These leading practices include examining and limiting exemptions, including municipal exemptions, requiring marking of all lines and laterals, including sewer lines and laterals; and encouraging the use of technologies to locate underground facilities, such as geographic information systems (GIS), which offer the most detailed and prolific pipeline mapping available.

The Need for GIS Mapping

This provision would take needed steps toward improved pipeline mapping and underground facility locating by requiring states to demonstrate adoption or progress toward adopting several leading practices within their damage prevention programs as criteria for applications to receive PHMSA damage prevention grant dollars. These leading practices include requiring "the use of commercially available technologies to locate underground facilities, such as geographic information systems..."

Standardized digital data on utility infrastructure yields better construction planning and execution by providing excavators with well-contrived designs that avoid or mitigate utility conflicts. Virtual design and construction technologies eliminate potential for damages well before construction begins; moreover, these methods expedite construction, providing tremendous cost savings on projects.

Consistent success is predicated upon: 1) professionally investigating and documenting existing utilities early in design; and 2) acquiring accurate digital as-built data on all newly installed and exposed utilities.

At a time when we are in the midst of the largest infrastructure build out in American history, and some \$550 billion in new infrastructure investments is coming into a range of subsurface infrastructure markets, damage prevention to underground facilities is more important than ever. We believe the provisions described above related to underground damage prevention will undoubtedly improve pipeline safety and we encourage the committee to include this language in the Senate Commerce Committee bill when it is introduced.

We appreciate your consideration, and we encourage the introduction of pipeline safety reauthorization legislation in the near future.

Best Regards,

Associated Equipment Distributors

Association of Equipment Manufacturers

Distribution Contractors Association

Laborers International Association of North America

Pennsylvania Utility Contractors Association

Pipeline Open Data Standard Association (PODS)

Plastics Pipe Institute

United Association of Union Plumbers and Pipefitters