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Contact: Julia P. Valentine

Tel: 202-366-4831

U.S. Department of Transportation Gives Over \$2 Million to Help States Improve Pipeline Safety and Prevent Damage

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Transportation’s Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) today announced \$2.010 million in grants for 24 states to improve pipeline safety. The grants will help states establish or improve underground pipeline damage prevention programs.

“Accidents caused by digging are 100 percent preventable,” said Secretary LaHood. “These grants will help states save lives and prevent damage to pipelines by creating or improving existing state safety programs.”

The Department is providing grants to projects that involve the key elements of effective pipeline damage prevention programs, including increased communication between pipeline operators and stakeholders, the use of technology in locating pipelines, and partnerships in employee training and public education.

On April 4, 2011, U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood launched a national pipeline safety initiative to repair and replace aging pipelines to prevent potentially catastrophic incidents. Secretary LaHood called upon U.S. pipeline owners and operators to conduct a comprehensive review of their oil and gas pipelines to identify areas of high risk and accelerate critical repair and replacement work.

Secretary LaHood also announced support for federal legislation aimed at strengthening oversight on pipeline safety, as well as plans to convene a Pipeline Safety Forum on April 18th in Washington, DC, to gather state officials, industry leaders, and other pipeline safety stakeholders in order to discuss steps for improving the safety and efficiency of the nation’s pipeline infrastructure.

“These grants will help states minimize risks and enforce State laws dealing with damage prevention,” said PHMSA Administrator Cynthia Quarterman.

The State Damage Prevention (SDP) grants were established by the Pipeline Inspection, Protection, Enforcement, and Safety (PIPES) Act of 2006. The award recipients are:

- Utility Notification Center of Colorado - \$100,000;
- Call Before You Dig, Incorporated in Connecticut - \$57,885;
- Georgia Public Service Commission - \$100,000;
- Idaho Public Utilities Commission - \$100,000;
- Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission - \$100,000;
- Iowa Utilities Board - \$100,000;
- Kansas Corporation Commission - \$82,920;
- Kentucky Underground Protection Inc - \$95,738;
- Michigan Public Service Commission - \$83,600;
- Minnesota Office of Pipeline Safety - \$100,000;
- Mississippi Public Service Commission - \$100,000;
- Missouri Public Service Commission - \$32,000;
- Nebraska Pipeline Safety Division - \$65,757;
- Public Utilities Commission of Nevada - \$94,500;
- New Mexico Pipeline Safety Bureau - \$100,000;
- Dig Safely New York - \$99,771;
- North Carolina Utilities Commission - \$30,300;
- Pennsylvania One Call System - \$100,000;
- Palmetto Utility Protection Service in South Carolina - \$38,900;
- South Dakota Public Utilities Commission - \$28,337;
- Railroad Commission of Texas - \$100,000;
- Vermont Department of Public Service - \$99,926;
- Virginia Utility Protection Service - \$100,000; and
- Miss Utility of West Virginia - \$100,000.

Grant recipients under the SDP grant program must provide mid-term and final progress and financial reports to PHMSA that demonstrate completion of their work as outlined in the grant agreements. PHMSA will thoroughly oversee this process to evaluate the expected outcomes of each grant project.

These grants complement National Safe Digging Month, held during the month of April. As spring gardening and landscaping projects get underway, the U.S. Department of Transportation works to raise awareness about the need to call 811 before starting digging projects. Calling 811 can save not only lives, but protect homeowners from property damage and injuries. Toll-free state 811 call centers work with pipeline operators and utility companies to mark pipelines before excavators and do-it-yourselfers begin digging projects.

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