



Highlights of [GAO-06-946](#), a report to congressional committees

GAS PIPELINE SAFETY

Integrity Management Benefits Public Safety, but Consistency of Performance Measures Should Be Improved

Why GAO Did This Study

The Pipeline Safety Improvement Act of 2002 established a risk-based program for gas transmission pipelines—the integrity management program. The program requires operators of natural and other gas transmission pipelines to identify “high consequence areas” where pipeline incidents would most severely affect public safety, such as those occurring in highly populated or frequented areas. Operators must assess pipelines in these areas for safety risks and repair or replace any defective segments. Operators must also submit data on performance measures to the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA).

The 2002 act also directed GAO to assess this program’s effects on public safety. Accordingly, we examined (1) the effect on public safety of the integrity management program and (2) PHMSA and state pipeline agencies’ plans to oversee operators’ implementation of program requirements. To fulfill these objectives, GAO interviewed 51 gas pipeline operators and surveyed all state pipeline agencies.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends revisions to PHMSA’s performance measures to improve the agency’s ability to determine the impact of the program over time. The Department of Transportation generally agreed with the report’s findings and recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-946.

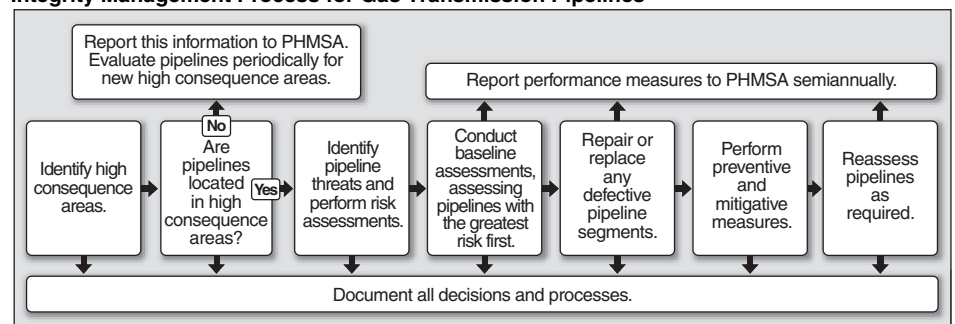
To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Katherine Siggerud at (202) 512-2834 or siggerudk@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The gas integrity management program is designed to benefit public safety by supplementing existing safety requirements with risk-based management principles that focus on safety risks in high consequence areas, such as highly populated or frequented areas. Early indications show that the condition of transmission pipelines is improving as operators complete assessments and related repairs of their pipelines. For example, as of December 31, 2005, operators had assessed 33 percent of pipelines in high consequence areas and completed over 2,000 repairs. Furthermore, up to 68 percent of the population living near gas transmission pipelines is expected to benefit from improved pipeline safety because they live in highly populated areas. Representatives from the pipeline industry, safety advocacy groups, and state pipeline safety agencies generally agree that integrity management improves public safety, but operators noted that the program can be costly to implement and cited concerns with implementing the program, such as meeting the documentation requirements. PHMSA’s performance measures should demonstrate the impact of the program over time. However, we are recommending revisions to improve the measures. For example, adjusting the incident reporting requirement to account for changes in the price of natural gas would allow PHMSA to more accurately track trends in pipeline incidents.

PHMSA and states plan to use a variety of inspection tools to oversee operators’ implementation of integrity management requirements and expect to complete the first round of inspections no later than 2009. To assist in conducting these inspections, PHMSA has developed a range of tools, including guidance documents and training courses for inspectors. Overall, state agencies have found these tools to be useful, although some states have found it difficult to schedule the required training courses and have some concerns about the adequacy of their staffing. To address these concerns, PHMSA is taking steps to make it easier for state inspectors to attend the training and supports providing additional funding to states. Initial results from 20 federal inspections and 117 state inspections show that operators are making good progress in assessing pipelines and making repairs, but they generally need to better document their decisions and processes.

Integrity Management Process for Gas Transmission Pipelines



Source: GAO.