

Pipeline Awareness

Facilitator Emily Morris introduced the evening's main topic, **Pipeline Awareness**, which was presented by a panel of experts. Morris moderated the panel, which included:

- **Martin Fontenot:** West Gulf Coast Pipeline Operations Manager, Air Products
- **J.W. Riley:** North American Pipeline Compliance Manager, Air Products
- **Marta Riendeau:** Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), U.S. Department of Transportation
- **Jay Prothro:** Client Success Master, Sander Resources / Buxus app

Morris asked each panelist to briefly explain their organization's role in pipeline operations:

Air Products: Air Products is an industrial gas company that produces and transports products including hydrogen, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, nitrogen, ammonia, nitric products, oxygen, and syngas. The company has plants connected across the Gulf Coast to New Orleans. Its flagship pipeline is a hydrogen pipeline from Pasadena to New Orleans. The pipelines support industrial gas delivery to refineries and area customers.

Marta / PHMSA: PHMSA is a federal agency under the U.S. Department of Transportation. It enforces federal safety regulations for operators that transport hazardous materials, including gasoline, natural gas, and other materials. PHMSA inspects operators, investigates incidents, and updates regulations when changes are needed.

Jay / Sander Resources: Jay stated that he has extensive pipeline-industry experience, including experience with PHMSA, and now works with Sander Resources, which developed the Buxus app. Buxus supports communication and response by providing pipeline-related details, commodity information, operator information, and information useful to responders.

Key Takeaways

The panel emphasized that pipeline safety depends on accurate public understanding, clear communication, coordination among operators and responders, and continued use of both proven practices and emerging technology.

Public Awareness and 811

- Calling 811 before excavation was presented as one of the most important safety practices for residents and contractors.
- 811 is free, and failing to call before digging can lead to financial responsibility and possible state penalties if a utility is damaged.
- Panelists emphasized that callers should wait for markings before proceeding, and should call again or submit another ticket if markings are not completed within the 48-hour period.
- The panel also addressed misconceptions that people may get in trouble for calling 811 or that calling 811 costs money.

Pipeline Markers and Right-of-Way Awareness

- Pipeline markers identify the presence of a pipeline but do not necessarily show the exact location or route of the pipe.
- A pipeline may not run in a straight line between markers, and the marker may not sit directly above the pipeline.
- Removing pipeline markers was described as illegal and potentially dangerous.

- Residents with pipeline easements may see operators access their yard when work is needed; communication with the resident would typically occur before an operator entered a back yard.

Incident Coordination and Emergency Response

- In an incident, the operator's role includes identifying the affected pipeline and isolating it as quickly as possible.
- Emergency coordination may include establishing a perimeter, using proper procedures, coordinating with responders, and managing traffic or roadblocks.
- In response to a question, the panel emphasized that shutoff valves should not be operated by the public; responders and operators should coordinate to ensure the correct valve is used.
- Valve spacing varies by operator and situation.

Technology, Buxus, ERG, and AI

- Advancements in leak detection technology has greatly improved pipeline safety, and includes the use of drones, satellite data, corrosion detection, and AI.
- Technology is improving how pipeline information is shared with emergency responders and operators.
- Buxus was described as a tool that supports communication by providing pipeline-related information, commodity information, operator information, and response-support details.
- The Emergency Response Guidebook (ERG) and related app-based or internet resources are tools for identifying hazard information.
- AI was described as useful for identifying higher-risk excavation tickets, comparing inspection tool runs, evaluating anomalies, supporting failure prediction, and helping assess welding.
- Panelists also emphasized that technology does not replace tabletop exercises, training, mailers, and other preparedness practices.

Regulation and Pipeline Condition

- PHMSA was described as the federal agency responsible for enforcing safety regulations for operators that transport hazardous materials.
- The panel noted that pipeline age alone is not the main indicator of risk; operation, maintenance, and other factors also matter and can increase longevity in an older pipeline.
- Pipeline safety regulations do not currently discuss AI, but regulations are routinely modernized.
- PHMSA was praised for faster review and approval of new safety technologies, which is required before new technologies can be used.