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All comments received before the close of business on the closing date indicated below will be considered. The application and supporting materials, and all comments received after the closing date, will also be filed and will be considered to the extent possible. When the application is granted or denied, the notice will be published in the **Federal Register** pursuant to the authority indicated below.

*Comment closing date:* July 7, 2003.

(49 U.S.C. 301118, 301120; delegations of authority at 49 CFR 1.50 and 501.8)

Issued on: June 2, 2003.

**Stephen R. Kratzke,**

*Associate Administrator for Rulemaking.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

### Research and Special Programs Administration

[Docket No. RSPA-98-4957]

#### Pipeline Safety: Revision of Natural Gas Distribution Incident and Annual Report Forms

**AGENCY:** Research and Special Programs Administration (RSPA), DOT.

**ACTION:** Notice and request for comments on revision of Information Collection OMB 2137-0522.

**SUMMARY:** In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, RSPA's Office of Pipeline Safety (OPS) is publishing its intention to revise forms RSPA F 7100.1, Incident Report For Gas Distribution Systems, and RSPA F 7100.1-1, Annual Report For Gas Distribution Systems, and the Instructions for those forms. The purpose of this notice is to request public comment on the proposed changes in the forms and on the information collection burden.

**DATES:** Comments on this notice must be received on or before August 4, 2003.

**ADDRESSES:** You may submit written comments by mail or delivery to the Dockets Facility, U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), Room PL-401, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, DC 20590-0001. The Dockets facility is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, except federal holidays. Comments should identify the docket number of this notice, RSPA-98-4957. You should submit the original and one copy. If you wish to receive

confirmation of receipt of your comments, you must include a stamped, self-addressed postcard.

You may also submit or review comments electronically by accessing the Docket Management System's home page at <http://dms.dot.gov>. Click on "Help & Information" for instructions on how to file a document electronically. All written comments should identify the docket and notice numbers stated in the heading of this notice.

*Comments are invited on:* (a) The need for the proposed collection of information for the proper performance of the functions of the agency, including whether the information will have practical utility; (b) the accuracy of the agency's estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; (c) ways to enhance the quality, utility and clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, including the use of appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques.

The forms are available for review in Docket No. RSPA-98-4957.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Roger Little by telephone at 202-366-4569, by fax at 202-366-4566, by mail at DOT, RSPA, OPS 400 Seventh Street, SW., Room 7128, Washington, DC, 20590, or by e-mail at [roger.little@rspa.dot.gov](mailto:roger.little@rspa.dot.gov).

#### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

*Background:* RSPA/OPS collects information on distribution pipeline incidents as part of its efforts to minimize natural gas distribution pipeline failures. The revised forms request additional information concerning the characteristics of an operator's pipeline system. This information is needed to "normalize" incident information for safety trend analysis. The process of making elements of data comparable for comparison purposes (as in finding a common denominator, for example) is known as "normalizing" the data. The requirements for reporting incidents are found in 49 CFR part 191. The regulations require submission of the natural gas distribution annual report form by March 15 of each year for the preceding year's operations. Reports on distribution incidents must be submitted to RSPA/OPS in writing within 30 days of the incident's occurrence.

Natural gas distribution incident and annual reports are important tools for

identifying safety trends in the gas pipeline industry. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), DOT's Office of the Inspector General and General Accounting Office have urged RSPA/OPS to revise the information collected on the natural gas distribution pipeline incident and annual report forms.

NTSB Safety Recommendation P-96-1 urges RSPA/OPS to:

\* \* \* develop within 1 year and implement within 2 years a comprehensive plan for the collection and use of gas and hazardous liquid pipeline accident data that details the type and extent of data to be collected, to provide the Research and Special Programs Administration with the capability to perform methodologically sound accident trend analyses and evaluations of pipeline operator performance using normalized accident data.

RSPA/OPS worked with representatives of the American Gas Association (AGA) to revise the natural gas distribution incident and annual report forms to make the information collected more useful to industry, government, and the public. RSPA/OPS also received suggestions for improvements from the National Association of Pipeline Safety Representatives, which represents state pipeline safety offices. State pipeline safety offices conduct safety inspections of natural gas distribution operators' records and facilities. They rely on report information for safety trending and inspection targeting.

The improvements to the natural gas distribution incident and annual report forms are necessary to address deficiencies in the current information collection. The form features more incident cause categories, impacts, failure mechanisms, locations, and other details about natural gas pipeline distribution incidents. The information derived from use of the form will make pipeline safety statistics more useful and more meaningful.

The proposed natural gas distribution operator annual report asks for pipeline mileage by decade installed. From 1970 through 1984, RSPA/OPS had a category for mileage by decade installed on the natural gas distribution operator annual report but the category was removed after the passage of the Paperwork Reduction Act.

#### Proposed Revision to Information Collection

*Abstract:* The forms to be revised are two of the four gas pipeline reporting forms authorized by Information Collection OMB 2137-0522, "Incident and Annual Reports for Gas Operators." The proposed revisions represent the