

PIPELINES

Feds warn companies on landslide hazards

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The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration has released a warning to pipeline operators about explosions caused by landslides. [Publicdomainpictures.net](https://www.publicdomainpictures.net)

Federal regulators are reminding pipeline companies of the dangers posed by erosion and landslides.

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) has issued an "advisory bulletin" about the hazards, which have been dogging pipeline builders and operators as they try to move natural gas and other products through the mountainous Appalachian region.

Landslides, subsidence, floods and other geological hazards can bend pipelines beyond the breaking point, causing ruptures, spills and explosions.

"Owners and operators of gas and hazardous liquid pipelines are reminded that earth movement, particularly in variable, steep, and rugged terrain and with varied geological subsurface conditions, can pose a threat to the integrity of a pipeline if those threats are not mitigated," says the bulletin, issued Monday over the name of Alan Mayberry, associate administrator for pipeline safety.

The **bulletin**, to be published today in the *Federal Register*, cites rules requiring pipeline companies to patrol their lines and fix problems in a reasonable amount of time.

It also includes suggestions for avoiding problems, such as choosing routes that avoid steep slopes. Among other measures, the bulletin suggests monitoring lines with strain gauges, which measure movement of the pipes.

PHMSA could use the bulletin to strengthen its case in future enforcement actions if geologic hazards such as landslides cause explosions or other accidents. The bulletin could make such an action less vulnerable to appeal by establishing that pipeline operators should be aware of the hazards and rules.

Pipeline industry representatives say they already have detailed, established methods to avoid damage to their lines from landslides and other movement.

"These events are rare and that's a testament to the engineering and science that goes into permitting, constructing and maintaining pipelines," said C.J. Osman, director of operations, safety and integrity at the Interstate Natural Gas Association of America (INGAA). "Our goal is to prevent these events from occurring."

Pipelines in Appalachia have been plagued in the past year by landslides and other problems resulting from land movement. The landslides have often been linked to unusually heavy rains.

Heavy rains have also caused problems for construction of the Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley pipelines through Virginia and West Virginia (*E&E News PM*, Dec. 7, 2018).

The notice cited seven explosions and spills as "notable." Most were in Appalachia, such as a Jan. 29 rupture near Lumberport, W.Va., caused when a landslide moved an Equitrans Midstream Corp. pipeline about 10 feet.

But it also cited a 2016 spill in North Dakota caused by a landslide and a 2016 explosion on a 22-inch gas transmission line in Montecito, Calif., as the region battled flooding and mudslides.

It does not mention a January explosion in southeastern Ohio linked to land movement. The explosion on the 30-inch Texas Eastern Transmission pipeline injured two people and damaged two homes (*Energywire*, April 3). But it does refer to another explosion a year earlier 5 miles away on a different pipeline, the Rockies Express.

Also, Energy Transfer Partners LP subsidiary Sunoco Pipeline LP has had problems with sinkholes opening in the Philadelphia suburbs near its problem-plagued Mariner East 1 pipeline.