

## E&E Greenwire

### COVID-19 prompts delay for federal pipeline rule

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It took nearly 10 years after a gas pipeline explosion in San Bruno, Calif., to finalize new federal rules for the lines. Now, implementation is being delayed another five months.

Because of staffing constraints caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration is postponing enforcement of compliance deadlines. They'd been scheduled for July 1 but are being pushed back to Dec. 31.

PHMSA sent out a [notice](#) on the postponement last night.

"This enforcement discretion will allow operators additional time to fully incorporate the new procedures required pursuant to the Final Rule through a management of change process that may be slowed by the challenges of competing resource demands caused by the National Emergency," the notice states.

The rule is intended to bring more pipeline inspections to less-populated areas, require checking pressures on previously unregulated pipelines and remove exemptions for testing gas lines built before 1970. The 307-page document to be published today has numerous other changes, including extending federal integrity management rules into areas not previously covered ([Energywire](#), Oct. 1, 2019).

Eight people were killed Sept. 9, 2010, when a gas transmission line exploded in San Bruno. Federal investigators found line owner Pacific Gas and Electric Co. had failed to detect and repair a defective pipe section.

Many of the implementation dates already extend well past this summer. For example, the "moderate consequence areas" to be newly covered by the integrity management rules must be assessed initially within 14 years.

In addition to responding to the San Bruno explosion, the rules include responses to recommendations by the National Transportation Safety Board and watchdog agencies, and address mandates in pipeline legislation passed by Congress in 2011 and 2016.