

DOT purges pipeline safety advisory committees to focus 'on what matters'

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By Tom Tiernan

The US Transportation Department fired all the members of two advisory committees that help shape pipeline safety regulations, asserting that the groups need a refresh.

Members of the [Gas Pipeline Advisory Committee](#) (GPAC) and Liquid Pipeline Advisory Committee (LPAC) confirmed to Platts, part of S&P Global Commodity Insights, that they received letters from DOT in mid-August, informing them that their services were terminated.

Sara Rollet Gosman, associate professor at the University of Arkansas Law School, said on Aug. 27 that she received a letter ending her membership on the GPAC and thanking her for her service. Gosman declined to discuss the move, as did Bill Caram, executive director of the Pipeline Safety Trust, who served on the LPAC and received a similar letter.

The committees review proposed pipeline regulations "to assure the technical feasibility, reasonableness, cost-effectiveness and practicability of each proposal," according to a description on the US Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) website. The site showed all 15 member slots on both committees as vacant as of Aug. 28.

The Trump administration and Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy are refocusing the committees "on what matters," according to a DOT spokesperson. The spokesperson said the agency notified committees of the plan to reconstitute membership in compliance with an executive order from President Donald Trump.

New focus

DOT's federal advisory committees "are long overdue for a refresh," the DOT spokesperson said in an Aug. 27 email. "Many have not held a single meeting in over a year, while others have not produced recommendations or advisory reports."

The spokesperson also said some committees had a "DEI and climate agenda."

It is not up to the committee members to hold or schedule meetings, as that is the responsibility of the designated federal officer within DOT, said Richard Kuprewicz, who served on the LPAC for many years. Kuprewicz is an engineer and the president of Accufacts Inc.

Kuprewicz, who represented the public sector on the LPAC, said he was not surprised to receive the termination letter based on the Trump administration's approach to regulation and the exodus of many leaders at PHMSA earlier this year.

"We served at the discretion of the secretary," Kuprewicz said Aug. 28.

When told of the agency's reasoning for the reconstitution of the committees, Kuprewicz said, "That's a bunch of BS." The two committees have served the public well over the years, he said.

New membership

People interested in serving on the committees are encouraged to apply for appointments, and at least one former member reached by Platts intends to seek reappointment. The committees are made up of representatives from three sectors: the pipeline industry, government and the public. The members provide input on the wording of proposed rules or safety initiatives within PHMSA.

The LPAC and GPAC held a virtual meeting in January that covered [industry standards](#) and cost recovery for siting reviews of LNG facilities.

A committee member who declined to be identified was surprised by the letter from DOT, which did not provide any reasoning for the termination. "The committees play a central role in how we develop policy around critical infrastructure," the person said. The committees had a few members who were not there to "find a path forward" and opposed many of the safety initiatives that were discussed, the person said during a brief interview.

LPAC members included representatives from [Colonial Pipeline Co.](#), [Kinder Morgan Inc.](#), [Phillips 66](#) and [Enterprise Products Partners LP](#). GPAC members included individuals from [TC Energy Corp.](#), [DTE Gas Co.](#) and [Williams Cos. Inc.](#)

The Liquid Energy Pipeline Association "understands the desire of each administration to select their advisers and looks forward to future opportunities to share pipeline operations insights with PHMSA through its public advisory committees," said Andy Black, president and CEO of the association.

A spokesperson for the Interstate Natural Gas Association of America said the group has no concerns with the committee changes, "but when the GPAC is

reconstituted, it will be critical to have pipeline operator representation."

The charters for the LPAC and GPAC say that members shall be appointed based on their experience in safety regulations for the transportation of gas or hazardous liquids in pipelines and must be qualified to evaluate safety standards through training, experience or knowledge in engineering fields applicable to pipeline operations.

PHMSA has several gas pipeline safety regulations pending for comment, with Acting Administrator Ben Kochman leading the agency while Paul Roberti, Trump's nominee for the administrator role, goes through the Senate confirmation process.

PHMSA's reauthorization legislation is overdue for action by Congress. The Senate and House committees with authority over pipeline safety have held [hearings on the topic](#), but legislation has not advanced.

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