



## News

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### **U.S. Department of Transportation Seeks \$2.52 Million Penalty Against El Paso Pipeline For Safety Violations in Pipeline Failure**

The U.S. Department of Transportation's Research and Special Programs Administration (RSPA) today announced it is seeking the largest civil penalty ever proposed against a gas transmission pipeline operator in the history of the federal pipeline safety program.

The \$2.52 million civil penalty, proposed today by RSPA's Office of Pipeline Safety (OPS), is against El Paso Energy Pipeline Group for safety violations related to the August 2000 pipeline failure in Carlsbad, N.M.

"We must do everything we can to prevent loss of life from pipeline failures. The penalties we seek in this case reflect the importance of comprehensive integrity management programs. The importance of thorough risk assessments, training and communication of vital safety information among all operating elements of a company must be emphasized," said RSPA Acting Deputy Administrator Edward Brigham.

This penalty action includes fines against El Paso for safety violations identified during OPS's investigation following the failure, which resulted in the deaths of 12 people.

RSPA cited El Paso for the following safety violations:

- Failing to ensure that qualified personnel perform required internal corrosion control procedures.

- Transporting corrosive gas on numerous occasions without taking proper preventive and mitigative steps. This included failing to communicate to appropriate personnel when excessive water content was in the gas stream and when liquids and solids were found, and failing to perform necessary tests for corrosion.
- Failing to follow procedures for continuing surveillance of its facilities which would have led to action to control collection of liquid at low points, thereby mitigating conditions which led to the accident.
- Failing to take action to minimize the possibility of a failure recurrence following a similar incident in 1996.
- Not having an accurate elevation map for lines involved in the accident, which would have shown low points where liquid could accumulate and corrosion could occur.

After the pipeline failure in August 2000, OPS ordered the pipeline to be shut down. Since that time, El Paso has performed required hydrostatic testing, internal inspection, repairs to areas with critical metal loss, other forms of direct assessment, revised corrosion control procedures and training, and established a comprehensive integrity management program. OPS has monitored these actions on an ongoing basis to assure that all actions needed to return the line to a safe condition are being taken.

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