



CALIFORNIA, 30TH DISTRICT

CONGRESSMAN BRAD SHERMAN

August 17, 2018

Mr. Howard Elliott
Administrator
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials
Safety Administration (PHMSA)
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Administrator Elliott,

The Aliso Canyon gas leak was the largest methane leak from any natural gas storage facility in United States history. The four-month gas leak that started on October 23, 2015 displaced more than 7,000 families from their homes and forced them to relocate. Two schools in the area were closed for the duration of the school year. Thousands of residents experienced health symptoms consistent with odorants added to the natural gas.

A few months later, I met face-to-face with then-President Barack Obama and received a commitment that the federal government would issue natural gas storage safety regulations. That commitment was honored on December 19, 2016 when PHMSA released an Interim Final Rule (IFR) on underground natural gas storage safety standards.

On June 22, 2016, the Obama administration reaffirmed its commitment, and the Protecting Our Infrastructure of Pipelines and Enhancing Safety (PIPES) Act, which passed Congress unanimously, was signed into law. This legislation required PHMSA to establish minimum federal standards for underground natural gas storage facilities within two years.

On June 20, 2017, several months into the Trump administration and in response to requests from the oil and gas industry, PHMSA halted the rule from going into effect and announced that it would not be enforcing any citations for violations. It is troubling that one of the petitioners is the American Gas Association, which includes in its membership SoCalGas, the operator of the Aliso Canyon Natural Gas Storage Facility.

I wrote to PHMSA expressing concern with the decision to block implementation of the final rule in October 2017. You replied that you were reopening the comment period, which I appreciate. However, this comment period closed on November 20, 2017. Almost one year later, there has been no tangible progress.

Furthermore, the two-year statutory deadline to establish standards in the PIPES Act has passed. It's outrageous that almost three years since the largest methane leak from any natural gas

storage facility in the United States, that these facilities have no federal standards. This lack of action is unacceptable.

It is imperative that we establish federal safety regulations. The State of California has already issued a number of new rules to oversee underground natural gas storage facilities, but this is not a substitute for federal oversight.

As a resident of Porter Ranch who lives as close as anyone to the nation's largest methane leak, I join my community in urging PHMSA to promptly promulgate enforceable rules that establish mandatory and meaningful safety standards that are at least as strong as those contained in the IFR.

The Aliso Canyon gas leak demonstrates that in the absence of sensible federal standards for underground natural gas storage facilities, the safety of communities is jeopardized. To prevent these disastrous consequences from happening again, PHMSA must act swiftly to fulfill its responsibilities under the PIPES Act.

Sincerely,



BRAD SHERMAN
Member of Congress