PHMSA Issues Stay of Enforcement Notice

On Friday, March 20, PHMSA issued a “Stay of Enforcement” on federal requirements for operator qualifications (OQ), control room management (CRM) and employment drug testing requirements. Effective March 20, PHMSA will not be taking enforcement action with regard to OQ and CRM, and will consider exercising discretion with regard to drug testing requirements. In their notice, PHMSA notes that some pipeline operators are finding it extremely difficult to meet one or more of these regulatory requirements because of personnel and resource constraints due to the “National Emergency” and have sought temporary relief as they develop strategies and alternatives for maintaining normal operations and protecting the health and safety of their personnel and the public. On Monday, March 23, the Department of Transportation (DOT) provided additional guidance on compliance with the DOT’s drug and alcohol testing.

PHMSA encourages all operators to communicate regulatory challenges with State enforcement bodies, and document all instances where operators seek exemption for regulations. A full copy of the report can be found here.

AGA encourages operators to have frequent conversations with their state regulators on how they are implementing pandemic plans, how work will change if a large portion of the workforce is impacted by COVID-19, how state and local orders are impacting work, and potential challenges if the impact of COVID-19 continues into the summer. Contact Sonal Patni, spatni@aga.org.

AGA Letter to State and Local Organizations

On Friday, March 20, AGA sent a letter to the leadership of the National Governors’ Association, the Democratic and Republican Governors’ Association, US Conference of Mayors, National League of Cities, National Association of Counties, National Conference of State Legislatures, Council of State Governments, and National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners to request that they adhere to the Department of Homeland Security Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) guidance to ensure natural gas utility workers are classified as essential critical infrastructure workers.

We received positive feedback from each group and will continue to work with our state and local partners to ensure America’s natural gas utility workers have the ability to maintain our critical services during this national crisis.

The letter is available on the AGA website here. In addition, AGA has created a letter that companies can send to state and local government officials. That letter can be found on the “Members Only” portion of the COVID-19 website. If you have any questions about this outreach to state agencies, please contact Dan Lapato, dlapato@aga.org, or Frank Canavan, fcanavan@aga.org.
COVID-19 PSA: INCORRECT USE OF CLOROX WIPES MAY INCREASE CROSS BORE RISK

As a result of the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, many Americans are working from home and making health and cleaning a top priority. Disinfecting wipes are helping people combat the spread of germs, but some individuals are not properly disposing of the wipes and are flushing used wipes instead of disposing of them in the trash. According to the New York City Dept. of Environmental Protection, these wipes can cause damage to sewer systems and equipment even if they are labeled “flushable” or “septic-safe.” Reports are also indicating higher drain cleaning activity in laterals and even in mainline sewer system pumps. This is leading to sewer blockages all across the US and increasing the risk of “activating” existing cross bores. Please consider providing your customers the safety message -“Avoid flushing disinfectant wipes and dispose these types of wipes in waste bins”! In addition, please consider outreach to plumbers to “call before they clear” to confirm that a cross bore does not exist in the sewer line that is to be cleared.

NATURAL GAS CONTROL ROOM COVID-19 SURVEY RESULTS

In a recent survey of natural gas control room precautions taking place to minimize the impact of COVID-19, the vast majority of utilities that responded have implemented restricting control room access to essential personnel only. A small percentage of utilities have moved to sequestering control room personnel altogether, and many others are in the planning stages of sequestration, should it become necessary. The full survey summary can be found here. Contact Amanda Sramek, asramek@aga.org.

FMCSA ISSUES SET OF WAIVERS FOR COMMERCIAL VEHICLES DELIVERING EMERGENCY RELIEF

Last week, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) issued an expanded national emergency declaration to provide hours-of-service regulatory relief to commercial vehicle drivers transporting emergency relief in response to the nationwide COVID-19 outbreak. You can access the press release here for more information. We encourage you to view the FMCSA webpage for more information and FAQ’s on compliance with FMCSA regulations. Contact Jackie Malatesta, jmalatesta@aga.org.

DHS CRISIS EVENT RESPONSE AND RECOVERY ACCESS (CERRA) FRAMEWORK

The capability for State, local, tribal, and territorial authorities to safely, securely, and effectively control and coordinate the access of key response and recovery resources into an affected area during an emergency has been identified as a critical success factor in enabling overall community recovery. In light of the current emergency environment, it may be beneficial for facilities to be prepared with updated procedures for any re-entry issues. AGA has posted DHS’s Crisis Event Response and Recovery Access (CERRA) Framework to our website. Contact Amanda Sramek, asramek@aga.org.

B109.2 STANDARD APPROVED BY ANSI

The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) has approved the revised B109.2 Standard, “Diaphragm-Type Gas Displacement Meters (500 Cubic Feet Per Hour Capacity and Over)”, as a new American National Standard (ANS). Approval by ANSI signifies that the standards developer, AGA in this case, has followed an approved consensus method for the development of the standard. A consensus method affords all affected parties due process such as a right to review the content, submit public comment, and file an appeal. The new standard is formally referred to as ANSI B109.2-2020.
Why is this revised standard considered a “new” standard by ANSI? The previous edition of B109.2 was approved by ANSI in 2008. However, ANSI withdrew recognition of B109.2 in 2018 in accordance with Section 4.2.1.3.1 of the ANSI Essential Requirements, which requires them to do so for standards that have not been revised or reaffirmed in 10 years. AGA has been in the process of an extensive revision to B109.2 since then. Having now received approval of B109.2-2020 as a new standard, AGA staff is working on final preparations for publication. Contact Luis Escobar, lesocobar@aga.org.

PHMSA TO HOST WEBINAR ON RESULTS OF RESEARCH

On Thursday March 26, from 1pm to 3pm EST, PHMSA will hold a webinar focusing on the results of two research projects. These results are on key projects supporting innovation in crystal dry-coupled high efficiency ultrasonic sensors and with robotic deployment of EMAT sensors for corrosion inspection of natural gas pipelines that are hard to inspect with traditional In Line Inspection. More information on each project can be found here and here. Contact Mike Slusarz, mslusarz@aga.org.

2020 DCA & AGA UTILITY CONTRACTOR WORKSHOP — NEW DATES: JUNE 29-JULY 1

With the safety and wellbeing of our registrants being our top priority, the DCA/AGA workshop has been postponed to address the concerns of the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. The workshop has been moved to dates June 29-July 1. Click here to register. Contact Kofi Woodley, kwoodley@aga.org and/or Eben Wyman, eben@wymanassociates.net for additional details.

2020 AGA/SPE BIENNIAL UNDERGROUND STORAGE OPERATORS WORKSHOP

NEW DATES: OCTOBER 20-21

AGA and the Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE) have postponed their upcoming underground storage workshop until October 20-21. The meeting will still address topics related to safe and effective operation of natural gas underground storage facilities and be held in Bloomington, Indiana. Registration and the opportunity to sponsor for this workshop will be available shortly. Contact Sonal Patni, spatni@aga.org.
AGA is closely monitoring the COVID-19 pandemic. For now, we are moving forward with preparations for our spring committee meetings and conference.

The 2020 AGA Operations Conference will be held Tuesday, May 19 – Friday, May 22 at the Sheraton Grand Chicago. The conference will feature more than 120 presentations by industry experts addressing relevant and timely topics. Preliminary Program  Sponsorship Opportunities

In addition, AGA’s Operations Section Spring Committee Meetings will be held in conjunction with the conference on Monday, May 18 – Tuesday, May 19. Detailed committee meeting agendas will be available in March.

Note: Committee officers should plan to participate in the Steering Groups Planning meeting on Sunday, May 17, from 1:30-4:00 p.m.

Community Service Program Now Confirmed – May 17, 11 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Join your industry friends and colleagues on Sunday, May 17, to build bikes for underprivileged children. AGA is organizing this team-building event as part of the annual Operations Conference volunteer program “Giving Back to the Communities We Serve.” Help us reach our goal of assembling 20 bikes for underprivileged children. Make sure to sign up when you register!

For hotel, registration and sponsorship, please contact Annemarie O’Donoghue, aodonoghue@aga.org. For program information, please contact Debbie Ellis, dellis@aga.org.
THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!

Partnering with AGA as a sponsor of the Operations Conference helps us to ensure the best possible Conference experience for attendees, i.e., your customers. This prestige event gives you the best opportunity to market your products and services to your specific audience. As the AGA Operations Conference continues to grow year after year, we are especially grateful to all our sponsors for their generous support. For sponsorship information and a prospectus, please visit the event webpage or contact Annemarie O’Donoghue, aodonoghue@aga.org.
Surveys & Data Requests

Due Now: February 2020 PPD Report: [CLICK HERE](#) to download the reporting forms. If you need assistance with any of the reporting forms, contact Debbie Ellis, dellis@aga.org.

Available Now

2019 Workforce Development and Training Compendium: AGA’s Workforce Development Task Group has recently updated the 2019 Workforce Development and Training Compendium. The compendium is a repository of various certification courses, programs, internships and professional development opportunities available across the country for individuals interested in a career in the natural gas industry as well as those looking to enhance their skills.

Updated! Natural Gas Market Indicators - summarizing recent developments in natural gas pricing, heating and cooling degree days’ statistics, underground storage, domestic gas production, rig counts, pipeline imports and exports, and international LNG issues. Contact Richard Meyer, rmeyer@aga.org.

Discussion Groups (full and limited members ONLY)

AGA’s Operations Discussion Groups are an opportunity for member companies to come together to address operational challenges.

3/31: Engineering Planning & Approval, bstansey@aga.org
4/2: Pipeline Safety Management System, alu@aga.org
4/7: Viability of Natural Gas, kbuys@aga.org
4/16: Workforce Development & Training, jmalatesta@aga.org

TBD: Data Quality & Integration, spatni@aga.org
TBD: Corrosion Control, mslusarz@aga.org
TBD: Emergency Management & Public Safety, kwoodley@aga.org
TBD: Utilization Pressure Systems, jmeiers@aga.org

Committees (members ONLY)

AGA’s Operations Section Committees work together to anticipate, plan for and meet the operational challenges of the natural gas industry.

3/27: Gas Control Committee Conference Call, mslusarz@aga.org

Calendar

**MAY**

18-19: AGA Spring Technical Committee Meetings, Chicago, IL. Contact Debbie Ellis, dellis@aga.org

19-22: AGA Operations Conference, Chicago, IL. Contact Debbie Ellis, dellis@aga.org

**JUNE**

2-4: Best Practices Follow-up Conference, Los Angeles, CA. Contact Ken Buys, kbuys@aga.org

**JULY**

12-16: Gas Piping Technology Committee (GPTC) Meeting, Columbus, OH. Contact Betsy Tansey, bstansey@aga.org

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