

WASHINGTON



UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION  
COMMISSION

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The UTC regulates the services of privately or investor owned utility and transportation companies. Our mission is to ensure that services are fairly priced, available, reliable and safe.

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- Water
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- Airport Shuttles
- Commercial Ferries
- Natural Gas Pipelines
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**General Information**  
360-664-1160  
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## Pipeline Safety in Washington State

The Utilities and Transportation Commission (commission) is responsible for developing and enforcing safety standards for natural gas and hazardous liquid pipelines located within the state. The commission also inspects the portions of interstate natural gas and hazardous liquid pipelines located within Washington state; the standards and enforcement actions are the responsibility of the federal Office of Pipeline Safety (OPS).

### **How long has the state had a pipeline safety program?**

The commission has had a gas pipeline safety program since 1955 and a hazardous liquid pipeline safety program since 1996. In 2001, the state program was expanded to allow the commission to inspect interstate pipelines during construction, operation and after incidents. In some cases the commission and OPS staff may conduct joint inspections. Commission staff inspectors also investigate consumer and local government inquiries and complaints, Integrity Management Program inspections and operator qualification inspections.

### **Why do we need both a state and a federal program?**

Gaining state authority in 2001 to inspect interstate pipelines was a key recommendation of the Governor's Fuel Accident Prevention and Response Task Force. The expanded state role resulted in more pipeline inspections and improved follow-up on safety issues. The federal program is not staffed to provide this level of service, with no federal inspectors assigned to Washington state. In contrast, the state program is authorized to have 7 inspectors. Also, state inspectors develop ongoing expertise with specific pipeline facilities and operators, develop expertise in local conditions and can be more responsive to the concerns of local citizens and governments.

### **How many miles of pipelines are in the state?**

There are currently 21,526 miles of natural gas pipelines and 74 miles of hazardous liquid pipelines located completely within the state. There are 1,656 miles of interstate natural gas pipelines and 710 miles of interstate hazardous liquid pipelines.

# Pipeline Safety

## **How does the commission conduct inspections?**

The commission conducts two types of inspections. Field inspections involve physical testing and visual inspection of pipeline facilities. Audit inspections review the records maintained by a pipeline company to make sure that scheduled maintenance is being performed and that operator training and certification is current. Both types of inspections are essential to a comprehensive pipeline safety program. Major pipelines are scheduled to be inspected at least annually.

## **What happens if commission staff find a problem with a pipeline?**

It depends on the nature of the problem and whether the pipeline is located completely within the state or across state borders. For pipelines within the state, the commission can take enforcement action if a problem is identified and not corrected. For interstate pipelines, the commission will report inspection results to OPS. OPS will have 90 days from the state report to start an enforcement action, seek additional information, notify the state of any delay in enforcement or decline to take action.

## **Does the UTC deal with more than inspection and enforcement?**

Yes. A key element of the commission pipeline safety program is preventing pipeline damage, particularly through developing and distributing a training program for contractors, and improving the state's "Call Before You Dig" system. The program also includes a citizen advisory committee to advise state, federal and local agencies on pipeline safety issues.

## **How is the program funded?**

A mix of federal and state funds currently fund the program.

## **How do I contact the Pipeline Safety Program?**

If you have questions about the commission's Pipeline Safety program, call 360-664-1160.

## **For more information**

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