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API Guidelines for Right-of-Way Activities

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The liquid petroleum pipeline industry has developed these guidelines to improve understanding and increase awareness of the nature of underground pipelines that transport oil, petroleum products, natural gas liquids and other hazardous liquids (“pipelines” or “pipeline” throughout this document) and how to conduct land development and use activity near pipeline rights of way.

The guidelines are intended for use by anyone who is involved in land development, agriculture and excavation/construction activities near a pipeline. The industry’s goal is to protect public safety of the people who live and work along pipeline rights of way, protect the environment along rights of way, and maintain the integrity of the pipeline so that petroleum products can be delivered to customers safely and without interruption.

A pipeline right-of-way (ROW) is property in which a pipeline company and a landowner both have a legal interest. Each has a right to be there, although each has a different type of use for the land. Pipeline companies are granted permission from private landowners to transport petroleum products across their private lands. That permission is documented in a written agreement called an easement, and it is obtained through purchase, license, or by agreement with the landowner. In cases where the land is owned by the government—whether local, state or federal—similar arrangements for easements, licenses or occupancy agreements are obtained.

A pipeline requires regular observation, integrity assessment and maintenance to maintain the safety of its operations. Part of that task is to ensure that the pipeline ROW is kept clear of trees, structures and other encroachments that might interfere with the safe operation of the pipeline and the pipeline company’s access to the line.

The pipeline industry hopes that these guidelines will help both pipeline operators and people working and living along pipeline rights of way to better understand their respective responsibilities for maintaining the safety of this vital, but invisible, transportation system.

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