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ICC Holds Gas Infrastructure & Safety Policy Session

Chicago, IL...Led by Acting Commissioner Anastasia Palivos, the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) hosted a policy session on Monday to explore the infrastructure and safety of Illinois' gas distribution system. Three panels of experts addressed concerns about an aging pipeline infrastructure and highlighted key advantages to an upgraded system, and innovations in the industry to improve safety.

"Considering the increasing usage of natural gas as an efficient source of both distributed generation and a residential heat source, combined with concerns about the safety of aging pipeline infrastructure, it is now more important than ever to understand safety measures and recent innovation in the industry," said Palivos.

The first panel, moderated by ICC Legal & Policy Advisor Janel Haretoun, provided an overview of Illinois' gas distribution system. Panelists described the current gas pipeline systems' design attributes and spoke about the challenges of maintaining and repairing an aging pipeline system in rural and urban areas, and highlighted current projects. The experts included Andy Hesselbach, Vice President of Construction (*Peoples Gas*), Steven Murphy, Vice President of Engineering, Construction (*Southern Company/Nicor Gas*), and Eric Kozak, Vice President of Gas Operations (*Ameren Illinois*).

"As this weekend's weather emphasizes, natural gas helps to provide for the wellbeing of millions of people and this forum helps further ensure the safety and reliability of that service," said Murphy.

"The Natural Gas Consumer Safety & Reliability Act has provided Ameren Illinois with an unprecedented opportunity to invest in modernizing the state's natural gas system and to replace aging facilities," said Kozak. "By making these investments, we further our ability to deliver safe, reliable, clean natural gas to our customers and the communities we serve while keeping costs competitive."

“Even with the best processes, procedures and training, deteriorating materials and low pressure systems pose real risks to public safety. Monday’s policy session was a welcomed opportunity to discuss the challenges and substantial safety benefits of modernizing our gas infrastructure and we look forward to continued partnership and enhanced communication around this effort,” said Hesselbach.

The second panel, *Challenges and Benefits of Modernizing Gas Infrastructure*, moderated by Ritta Merza, Legal & Policy Advisor of the ICC, answered the question of how to modernize an old gas system and associated subsurface challenges. The panelists included Lori Traweek, Chief Operating Officer (*American Gas Association*), and Bryan Pemble, Pipeline Safety Analyst (*ICC*).

According to the Pemble, excavation is one of the leading causes for natural gas pipeline failures in Illinois and across the country. His presentation focused on damage prevention in Illinois and the ICC’s enforcement of the law requiring anyone excavating in Illinois to call the standardized one-call 8-1-1- phone number to notify the operators of underground utility facilities about planned excavation work. Since 2002, there have been nearly 4500 Incident Reports and the One-Call Enforcement program has issued over 3600 violations and collected almost \$1.3 million in penalties. The collected penalty dollars go to provide education and training on safe excavation practices.

The final panel, *Safety Considerations and Gas Systems of the Future*, moderated by ICC’s Katharine McErlean, focused on how to improve safety by using data, technology and analytics, and upgrading gas distribution systems. The panelists included Tony Lindsay, Research and Development Director (*Gas Technology Institute*), N. Johnathan Peress, Senior Director, Energy Market Policy (*Environmental Defense Fund*), Eric Lounsberry, Director, Safety and Reliability Division (*ICC*) and Tony Spiritoso, VP, Commercial & Customer Enablement (*Itron*).

Panelists highlighted new technologies available to promote safety, such as smart meters and remote disconnect devices. High sensitivity methane detectors can help utilities identify hazardous gas leaks, assess risk to prioritize projects, and manage costs.

Speaking about the benefits to modernized gas infrastructure, Lindsay said incidents involving cast iron mains are almost twice as likely to result in injury or death, compared with those made of other corrosion resistant materials. Cast iron mains are over four times more likely to be involved in an accident than those made of other materials. Newer materials greatly reduce leak points and are corrosion resistant.

Presentations from the policy session can soon be viewed by visiting the [ICC website](#).

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About the Illinois Commerce Commission

The Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) is a quasi-judicial body made up of five Commissioners. Through its

Public Utility Program, the Commission oversees the provision of adequate, reliable, efficient and safe utility services at the least possible cost to Illinois citizens served by electric, natural gas, telecommunications, water and sewer public utility companies. Through its Transportation Regulatory Program, the Commission oversees public safety and consumer protection programs with regard to intrastate commercial motor carriers of general freight, household goods movers, relocation towers, safety towers, personal property warehouses and repossession agencies. The Commission's Rail Safety Program also inspects and regulates the general safety of railroad tracks, facilities and equipment in the state.

To learn more about the Commission, its offices and bureaus, click [here](#). If you are a consumer who needs help resolving a utility dispute call 800-524-0795 or file an online complaint [here](#). For a complaint related to transportation, call 217-782-6448.

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