

THE DAILY LOCAL NEWS

Lack of Pipeline Safety Info Puts Schools, Students at Risk

By State Senator Andy Dinniman

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Back-to-school sales are in full swing. Students are finalizing their class schedules. And fall sports practices are gearing up.

As students prepare for another school year, thoughts always turn to safety. We strive to keep young people safe on our roads and school buses. We work to keep violence, guns, drugs, bullying, and any number of other dangers out of our schools.

But hazardous gas liquid pipelines are another matter – at least here in Pennsylvania.

In fact, nearly [40 public and private schools and daycare facilities](#) are located within or dangerously close to the thermal impact or “blast zone” of the Mariner East pipeline project, according to the FracTracker Alliance, a nonprofit that studies the risks of gas development. In Chester County they include:

- Exton Elementary School
- Lionville Middle School
- Hildebrandt Learning Center in Exton.
- The Goddard School in Exton.
- Kindercare Learning Center in Exton
- East Goshen Elementary School
- Ss. Peter and Paul School
- Ss. Simon and Judge School
- Goshen Friends School
- The Kanner Learning Center
- Twin Valley Elementary School

And if Sunoco reactivates an existing 12-inch, decades-old petroleum pipeline to carry hazardous natural gas liquids even more schools will be impacted.

Earlier this year, the superintendents of both the West Chester and the Downingtown Area School Districts [wrote](#) to Governor Tom Wolf requesting a comprehensive independent risk assessment of the Mariner East project in order to prepare emergency response and evacuation plans for their schools.

The fundamental problem, one that I find particularly egregious considering what is at stake, is **none of these schools have the basic information necessary to prepare for a potential pipeline emergency.** They don't have it because Sunoco won't give it to them. And they don't have it because our state government agencies, like the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, have failed to ensure they get what they need.

Keep in mind, other states have provided far more in terms of information, tools, and resources when it comes to the safety of pipelines that are close to our schools. Texas offers a [School Pipeline Safety Toolkit](#), which includes online courses and a comprehensive pipeline safety video for administrations.

There's also the [School Pipeline Safety Partnership](#), a national program that offers extensive information, including identifying pipeline location, recognizing leaks, preparing safety plans and even educating bus drivers on pipeline safety. Perhaps more importantly, the program allows pipeline operators to register and share information with schools located along their pipeline routes. School administrators can access this information via a password-protected website.

You see, despite concerns about state laws barring confidential security information related to these pipelines from the public, nothing stops a company itself from providing such information directly to emergency response officials or school administrators.

Pipeline companies can help prevent potential emergencies involving our schools and students. And many are already stepping forward to be good corporate citizens and work with school districts. Guess which one isn't? Sunoco. It doesn't appear to be listed anywhere on the site.

In response, I've introduced a package of bills to help ensure better safety in schools located near pipelines.

- [Senate Bill 930](#) requires pipeline companies to meet with the county emergency coordinators and provide necessary emergency response information. This information can then be used in preparing school safety and evacuation response plans. In fact, similar measures are already in place in California.
- [Senate Bill 931](#) calls for incorporating automatic or remote shutoff valves on pipelines in high consequence areas, like schools, to better protect the public and prevent potential emergencies.

In addition, I am currently drafting legislation, modeled after Texas law, to require pipeline operators to notify schools and share vital safety information with them when a pipeline is located within 1,000 feet of a school building, facility, playing field, playground or anywhere students congregate.

Yes, students and parents have enough to worry about these days. No, I don't dispute that pipelines, by and large, remain the safest way to transport such hazardous materials. Nor do I deny the economic benefits they stand to bring to the state.

But isn't that all the more reason why our schools need this information? At the bare minimum, don't students, teachers, and staff deserve to know what to do in a worst-case scenario? And as another school year begins, don't the pipeline industry and our state government have a duty to put safety first?

Right now, they don't. In my book, that's inexcusable and both Sunoco and our state agencies get an F.

Dinniman of West Whiteland is state Senator for Pennsylvania's 19th District. He serves as minority chair of the Senate Education Committee and on the Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee.