



Issue Paper: Cargo Tank Wetlines

Summary: Wetlines refer to the product piping underneath cargo tank trucks that transport gasoline and other flammable liquids. American Trucking Associations (ATA) and the National Tank Truck Carriers (NTTC) oppose a legislative mandate for the installation of costly equipment to purge residual produce from wetlines for the reasons discussed below.

Background: In 1998, following a fatal accident, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) issued a recommendation to the Department of Transportation (DOT) to prohibit the transport of flammable materials in wetlines to reduce the risk of serious injuries from the release of product in the event that a car crashes into a tank truck. In 2004, the Research and Special Programs Administration (RSPA), predecessor to the Pipeline and Hazardous Material Safety Administration (PHMSA) proposed a rule to regulate flammable liquids in wetlines. The proposed rule would have required tank trucks to install a device that pumped any residual liquid back into the tank prior to transportation. Based upon its analysis of data from incidents attributable to wetlines and the costs associated with requiring equipment to evacuate product from wetlines, PHMSA concluded that the costs of the proposed regulation exceeded its benefits and properly withdrew the proposed rule.

Industry Position: The industry's safety record demonstrates that a mandate for wetlines-purging equipment is simply not justified. An examination of DOT's hazmat incident database reveals that over the past 6 years there has not been a single wetlines incident that has resulted in a fatality or injury.¹ Since 1990, incident data reveals that 7 fatalities and 2 minor injuries, at most, could be classified as wetlines related incidents. By contrast, more than 100,000 cargo tank shipments of flammable liquids that occur each day and over 600 million shipments have occurred since 1990.

When DOT initially proposed to regulate wetlines, the data on wetlines incidents included accidents that were not properly attributed to wetlines. For example, if a car crashes into a cargo tank with enough force to breach the cargo tank and release a 2,000 gallons of fuel, that is not a wetlines incident, as it is clear that the fuel was released from the tank itself, not from the wetlines, which hold approximately 50 gallons. Once the DOT's hazmat incident database was properly analyzed to ensure that these types of incidents were not classified as wetlines incidents, it became clear that wetlines incidents are very infrequent.

A Congressional mandate to regulate cargo tank wetlines would have significant costs in terms of equipment, operations and, very possibly, to worker safety. In 2004, we estimated that 26,000 vehicles would be impacted at a cost of \$3,000 each. This figure did not include the costs associated with the "downtime" during the retrofit process, nor did it include the cost of hiring and training additional personnel responsible for maintaining wetlines purging equipment. From an operations standpoint, carrier efficiency would decrease as a result of delays at loading facilities waiting for wetlines to be purged. System malfunctions would further erode carrier efficiency. Finally there is concern over the safety of employees who would perform wetlines retrofits, as welding operations on vehicles used to transport flammable materials have resulted in serious injuries where the tank was not adequately cleaned and ventilated.

Congress should defer to the experts at PHMSA on the wetlines issue and should not take action to overturn the regulatory process and mandate a technology that would not appreciably increase the safe transportation of hazardous materials, but would impose significant costs on an industry that is struggling in this difficult economic environment.

¹ PHMSA Incident Reporting Data provided to ATA on April 28, 2009.