Out in West Texas at one of the largest crude oil terminals in the country, AFPM's oft-repeated line, "we make modern life possible," rings truer than ever. Plains All American Pipeline's Midland terminal moves roughly a million barrels of crude oil every day from the Permian Basin to refining, storage and distribution hubs, helping deliver the energy, fuels and products people rely on across the United States and around the world.

Robert Nobles is the Vice President of U.S. Facilities and Rail at Plains All American

On its own, the Midland terminal handles a volume equal to about 5% of daily U.S. oil liquids consumption, which comes out to far more crude oil than any single refinery processes in the United States. Given the scale, it's true that almost every American, at some point, has used fuel and materials that started out as oil moving through Midland.

In a Q&A with the AFPM team, Robert Nobles, Plains All American's vice president of U.S. facilities and rail, offers even more information about the Midland terminal, the products made possible by the American refining and petrochemical manufacturing industries, and the irreplaceable role of midstream energy infrastructure in America's energy success story and modern life.

AFPM: Tell us more about the Midland terminal and what it represents in the bigger picture of American energy.

Robert: Midland sits in the center of the Permian Basin, the leading oil-producing region in the United States. Our Midland terminal is a critical connection point between West Texas oil production and refineries, storage facilities and export markets.

I'm from Texas, and we like things bigger and better. So that's what we do at this particular terminal. We built a network of tanks and infrastructure that allows us to pump crude oil from this facility at a rate of 67,000 barrels per hour. That's, by far, one of the fastest pipeline terminals in North America. It's fair to say that the oil that travels through Midland—over a million barrels daily at full capacity—represents a big portion of North America's overall petroleum resources.

AFPM: What are the benefits of using pipelines to transport crude oil?

Robert: Without a doubt, pipelines are by far the safest mode of transportation for hydrocarbons, period. Pipelines carry energy efficiently; they do it safely; and they allow products to move in a more efficient and cost-effective way. In short, pipelines keep deliveries safe, on-time and affordable, which matters for everyone, especially consumers.

AFPM: Do you think most people understand the role that oil plays in their daily lives… including the oil transported through Midland?

Robert: When people think of refineries and oil, they often stop at gasoline. But gasoline is a little less than 50% of what's actually produced from a barrel of oil.

The refining and petrochemical industries turn crude oil into everyday things, from cell phones to healthcare supplies.

If you go to a hospital, you quickly see all the items and equipment made from oil and gas. Whether it's a surgical mask or an N-95, IV tubing, heart monitors or the basic gloves doctors and nurses use, all of those products come from crude oil and natural gas liquid feedstocks—the things we move in the midstream energy industry. I don't think people truly understand the impact the downstream and midstream energy industries have on their day-to-day lives. Our products actually save and change lives.

They also make things more convenient. Because of what we do on a day-to-day basis in our industry, refrigeration exists, home heating and air conditioning exist, and people have the freedom to travel whenever and wherever they want, on a moment's notice. That's a direct result of the things we do and the products we make from petroleum.

AFPM: When you talk to people who think oil and the industries behind it are eventually going to "go away," what do you tell them?

Robert: I'm glad you asked that question because I take it as a part of my responsibility to actively engage younger individuals and recruit more of them into this industry. What I tell them is simple: I point to the things we all need and use every day, and then I ask, do you like your cell phone? Do you like your computer? Do you like your cosmetics? Do you like your medicine? The work we do makes all these things possible. To quote Willie (Plains All American Pipeline CEO Willie Chiang), in this industry, "we have noble jobs, and what we do changes lives."

And in 20, 30, 50, 100 years from now, I still think hydrocarbons are going to be an integral part of our lives.

I'm “peacock proud” to be a Plains All American employee, and I'm even prouder to say that I work in the oil and gas industry.

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About AFPM Editorial:

The American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers (AFPM) is the leading trade association representing the makers of the fuels that keep us moving, the petrochemicals that are the essential building blocks for modern life, and the midstream companies that get our feedstocks and products where they need to go. We make the products that make life better, safer and more sustainable — we make progress.

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