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# Two buildings collapse after gas blast in NYC

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**By Marc Santora and Al Baker**

NEW YORK TIMES MARCH 26, 2015

**NEW YORK —** A powerful explosion in Lower Manhattan on Thursday caused two buildings to collapse and

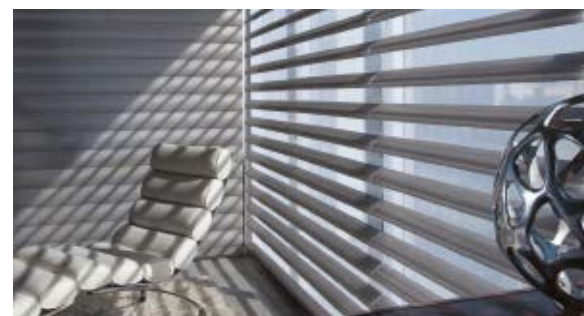
ignited a large fire that quickly spread to neighboring buildings, leaving at least 19 people injured.

As the fire raged in the East Village neighborhood, there were desperate attempts to flee, with residents jumping from fire escapes, and dramatic rescues, with one man climbing through the smoke to look for people who might have been stranded and others pulling a woman to safety.

The blaze was so intense that firefighters at one point had to withdraw from the buildings and engage in what one official called a “defensive outside attack,” pumping a deluge of water onto the structures.

Mayor Bill de Blasio, speaking at a news conference at the scene, said that “preliminary evidence suggests a gas-related explosion” was caused by plumbing and gas work being done at 121 Second Ave.

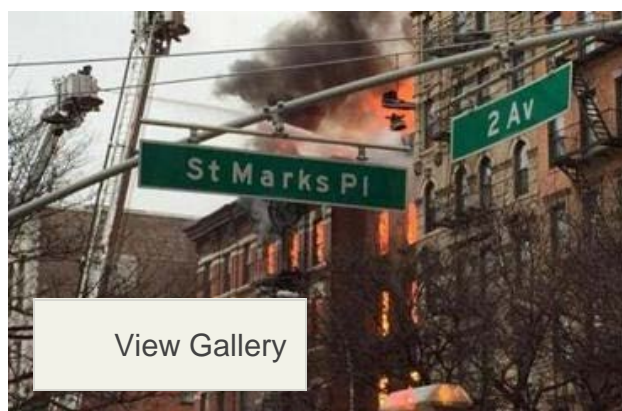
The explosion and ensuing fire destroyed that building and led to the collapse of an adjacent building, 123 Second Ave.



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## Photos: Building collapse

Preliminary evidence shows a gas-related explosion was to blame for the fire and building collapse, Mayor Bill de Blasio said.

**Images, reports from scene**

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For hours after the explosion, the fires burned and two other buildings, 119 and 125 Second Ave. were damaged. One of them, 119 Second Ave., was still in danger of collapse, officials said late Thursday.

More than 250 firefighters responded to what became a seven-alarm fire.

Among the 19 people reported injured, four were critically injured; four were firefighters who were taken to hospitals for treatment of minor injuries; and three others, including one emergency medical worker, declined medical attention at the scene, according to the Fire Department.

De Blasio said workers from the utility Consolidated Edison had been on the site about an hour before the explosion and had found the work being done there to be deficient. But the mayor said there were no calls reporting gas leaks before the explosion.

Michael S. Clendenin, a spokesman for Con Edison, said several buildings on Second Avenue had been “undergoing renovations” since as far back as August.

“Based on records here, the building has had some work done inside; new gas service pipes; a lot of things; piping and such,” Clendenin said.

City records show that both buildings contain commercial and residential space and were built in 1900. Records show 123 2nd Avenue is a five-story, 9,200 square-foot building containing three residential units, while the neighboring building is about 8,500 square feet, containing four residential units.

The first reports the Fire Department received were for a building collapse, and witnesses described a dramatic scene, with residents of the buildings scrambling down fire escapes to escape the raging flames and others dashing out of the rubble as the walls collapsed around them.

Niraj Desai, 36, a video game animator who works nearby, said he saw one woman stuck on a fire escape struggling to get the ladder unhooked.

“This poor girl was stuck upstairs,” he said. “She was having a hard time. You could tell there was a lot of emotion going on. A bunch of guys were down at the bottom helping her get down.”

Another man also made his way down the fire escape ladder before smoke started to pour from the building, he said.

“It was pretty crazy, pretty fast,” Desai said.

The authorities said that there were no initial reports of people missing and that those who were seriously injured seemed to have been hurt in the explosion.

Residents of five buildings, including the four damaged or destroyed, were unable to return home Thursday

night, according to the authorities. The Red Cross established a temporary shelter for them at Public School 63, at 121 E. Third St. By 9 p.m., 55 adults and one child had registered for services there.

Blake Farber, 29, a film director, said he had smelled a lot of gas and watched as two people who appeared to be working at the site were frantically running between Sushi Park, a restaurant on the ground floor of 121 Second Ave., and the residential entrance.

Seconds later, he said, he felt the blast and was enveloped by dust and smoke.

“And then I saw a bunch of people running out of the restaurant — I saw a man crawling on the ground,” he said. “He was crawling and he turned around and his face was bloody.”

The blast happened just over a year after a gas explosion leveled two buildings on Park Avenue in East Harlem, killing eight people. Federal investigators found a crack in a Con Ed gas main near the site and a separation between that main and a smaller pipe that led to a building next to the two that were destroyed.

The National Transportation Safety Board has not yet released its final report, which will provide its conclusions about what caused the explosion last March.

On Thursday, the reports of the emergency began with calls to 911, starting around 3:17 p.m. Several callers described hearing an explosion.

Nathan Blaney was at a nearby bar on St. Marks Place when he heard an explosion. His hands still shaking minutes later, he recounted running to the corner and finding about six injured people laid out on the sidewalk.

Blaney took photographs of the wreckage. The facade of the ground floor of the building, which housed Sushi Park, was entirely blown out. Shards of glass reached the sidewalk across the street. Blood was splattered up and down the block and across the street.

One man in a black apron had blood seeping from his head. Several other people were bleeding and covered with dust.

One woman was trapped on the building’s fire escape, apparently after climbing out of her apartment, Blaney said. She was stuck on the second floor, afraid to come down.

So a pedestrian — visible in pictures Blaney took — jumped onto the hanging ladder, climbed up and helped her descend to the sidewalk.

At 3:59 p.m. a loud rumble sounded and the lower facade of one of the buildings began moving. A moment later it slid slowly to the sidewalk in a mix of glass and loose bricks.

Heavy gray smoke filled the air, and a few moments later, as the smoke began to lift, it was evident that no part of the building was left standing.

Jordy Trachtenberg was smoking an electronic cigarette on St. Marks Place, trying to calm down after an explosion “rocked his apartment and made him jump” from his chair. Trachtenberg lives at 30 St. Marks Place, which faces the back of buildings on Second Avenue.

“I felt the ground shake underneath me, and then all this debris — plaster and glass — started pelting my windows,” he said. “I ran from my building when I saw the flames go up and my apartment filled with smoke,” Trachtenberg said. “I couldn’t breathe, I started gagging.”

“My first thought really was it was my home,” he said, “because we haven’t had gas for six months, and Con Ed was doing work outside today.”

He shouted out to neighbors who passed by, asking them if they were OK.

“Of course I know them,” he said. “I want to make sure everyone is OK. St. Marks is the tightest community in New York.”

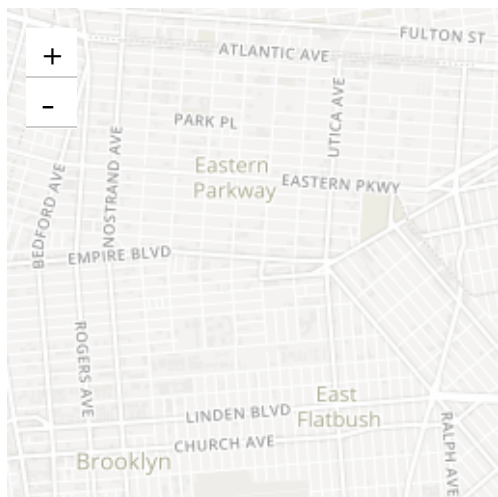


ANDREW BURTON/GETTY IMAGES

**Smoke rose from the fire.**

## Manhattan fire, building collapse

New York City firefighters are at the scene near Second Avenue and Seventh Street.



**DATA: New York City Fire Department**

MATT ROCHELEAU/GLOBE STAFF

*Jaclyn Reiss and Matt Rocheleau of the Globe staff contributed to this report. Material from the Associated Press and New York Times was used in this report.*



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# Jeb Bush is having a new house built for him at the family compound in Maine, even as he prepares for 2016 campaign

Jeb Bush, who has a lifelong relationship with this seaside town where generations of Bushes have vacationed, is having a new house built for him at the family compound on Walker's Point with a wraparound porch and expansive views of the Atlantic Ocean. The home — estimated to cost \$600,000 to build on a 1.3-acre site assessed by the town at \$1.4 million — is being built for him by his mother and father, who have tried to preserve the family ties to the picturesque property.

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## Cleveland officer acquitted in killings of unarmed pair

A Cleveland police officer was acquitted Saturday for his role in the 2012 fatal shooting of two unarmed people in a car.

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## Veterans frustrated by presidential debate on Iraq war

Iraq War veterans are frustrated watching Republican presidential contenders distance themselves from the decision to invade.

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## NSA winds down once-secret phone-records collection program

The National Security Agency has begun winding down its collection of phone records after the Senate failed to act.





## Calif. farmers volunteer cuts in water usage

State officials accepted an offer from some farmers to give up a quarter of their water this season.

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## Bipartisan Senate passes trade bill sought by Obama

The vote was 62 to 37 to give the president authority to complete trade deals that Congress could approve or reject, but not change.

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## Multiple attackers in deaths of D.C. family, police say

More than one attacker took four people captive in a Washington mansion, making them produce \$40,000 before killing them.

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## States are retooling police training to ‘demilitarize’ officers

A campaign is underway around the United States to “demilitarize” the police and produce officers who think of themselves as guardians of their communities, not members of an occupying force..

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## Biden tells Navy graduates of role in Asia

The vice president told Naval Academy graduates that American foreign policy is rebalancing toward the Asia-Pacific region.

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## Police say woman was found pushing dead 3-year-old son on Md. park swing

Authorities say she may have been there for hours, or even since the day before.

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## US, Cuba close round of talks with no embassy announcement

The United States and Cuba still have no agreement on reestablishing embassies.

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## Lawsuit says Fla. dentist ran ‘house of horrors,’ mistreated children

The dentist allegedly performed unneeded tooth extractions and procedures without anesthetic, a lawsuit says.

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## GM review said to find criminal wrongdoing

General Motors allegedly failed to disclose a defect tied to at least 104 deaths, and are negotiating what is expected to be a record penalty.

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## TLC pulls show after abuse report

TLC pulled “19 Kids and Counting” from its schedule on Friday following sexual misconduct allegations against one of the stars.



## After week in jail, Florida mom agrees to son's circumcision

A Florida woman's battle with her child's father over the boy's circumcision ended Friday with her agreeing to the procedure.

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## US pipeline accidents surge along with oil production boom

This week's pipeline leak in California points out that as US oil production has soared in recent years, so has the number of accidents.

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## Levy murder defendant may be retried

A man convicted of killing Washington intern Chandra Levy is expected to get a new trial.

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## For the record

Daily print correction for the newspaper.

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## Boy Scouts' ban on gay leaders must end, its president says

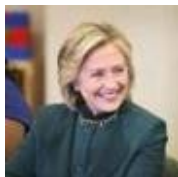
Robert Gates warned the group's executives that "we must deal with the world as it is, not as we might wish it to be."

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## 6 Baltimore officers indicted in Freddie Gray's death

A grand jury indicted the officers, who were charged in Gray's death last month.

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## Benghazi accounts changed quickly

Roughly 850 pages of Hillary Clinton's e-mails from her personal account relate to Libya and the 2012 attacks in Benghazi.

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