



Pressure inside Columbia Gas pipes was 12 times higher than normal

By [Milton J. Valencia](#) and [Matt Rocheleau](#), Globe Staff

September 17, 2018



Day-care provider Rosely Paulino cannot cook at her South Lawrence home or use hot water. She estimated she'll lost several customers and a significant source of family income - largely because parents will seek other care for their children.

Jessica Rinaldi/Globe Staff

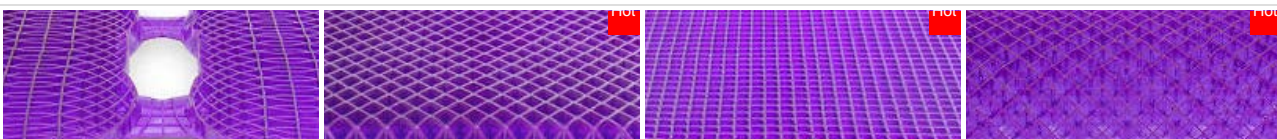
Natural gas was flowing through the pipes of several

Merrimack Valley towns at 12 times the normal rate last week, according to US Senators Edward J. Markey and Elizabeth Warren, who cited briefings from federal regulators in a Monday letter to the heads of Columbia Gas of Massachusetts, its parent company NiSource, and federal regulators.

The exact cause of the blasts that rocketed through Lawrence, Andover, and North Andover remains under investigation, though overpressurization was suspected.

“We write to request that you provide us with information in order to help the American people understand why this terrible disaster occurred, whether the company was sufficiently prepared to respond to an incident of this magnitude, and how we can prevent any similar tragedy in the future,” wrote Markey and Warren in their letter.

ADVERTISEMENT



Officials said Monday that more than 8,500 metered customers remain without gas service. As power was restored to most areas by Sunday, Columbia Gas announced that it will have to work to replace 48 miles of

pipeline after a review of the infrastructure.

The restoration of electricity Sunday allowed thousands of residents and business owners in Merrimack Valley an opportunity to return to their homes and workplaces. But within hours, residents realized that life is still far from normal without gas service, preventing many from basic living necessities, such as cooking or heating water, for weeks or more as utility crews scramble to fix lines.



Ana Gonzalez swept water off of the floor that had melted from the frozen items in the freezer at Carleen's Coffee Shoppe.

Jessica Rinaldi/Globe Staff

At Carleens Coffee Shoppe in South Lawrence Monday, a hand-written sign was posted on the front door to alert customers that the diner was closed because "unfortunately, we cannot cook without gas."

Inside the darkened restaurant, owner John Farrington pored over paper invoices, struggling to calculate the toll that Thursday's gas explosions and subsequent utility outages have had on his business — and will continue to have while he goes without gas service.

"I was surprised at how much I had to throw away," he said, as two employees in the back kitchen tossed produce into a dumpster and scrubbed cooking equipment damaged by water leaks.

ADVERTISEMENT



How to Become Fully Anonymous Online in Less ...

Download FigLeaf App



There Is One Protein That Can Restart Your "Fat Burn...

Gundry MD Proplant Supplements



U.S. Cardiologist: It's Like a Pressure Wash for Your Ins...

Gundry MD Total Restore Supplement



Forget Expensive Solar Panels (Do This Instead)

Modernize



Officials have estimated that some of the repairs could take two months.

That means that Rosely Paulino, the home day-care provider, who cannot cook at her home, or use hot water, will lose several customers and a significant source of family income — largely because parents will seek other care for their children, she said.

Deyaniri Garcia, who opened Delish Bakery Café only four months ago, will have to live in a state of uncertainty of whether she will be able to fulfill orders, such as for wedding cakes, for this weekend or next. “This is the only thing we do,” she said.

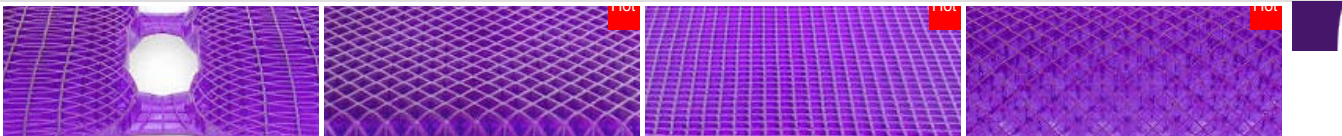
Get Metro Headlines in your inbox:
The 10 top local news stories from metro Boston and around New England delivered daily.

Enter email address: [Sign Up](#)

Governor Charlie Baker said Monday that local officials and community groups, after a meeting Monday morning, have set up a charitable foundation to help residents. The foundation will be accepting claim applications by the end of the week, he said, and is meant to fill the gap between any immediate claims residents have filed against Columbia Gas, and their forecasted losses.

“For many people, this is going to take a while, and it’s going to create some real hardships for them,” said Baker after a roundtable discussion with local officials, including Mayor Dan Rivera of Lawrence. “I think the ripple associated with that is real.”

ADVERTISEMENT



Rivera added, “The need is clear, and the complexity of the need is clear.”



Juan Polo, who owns two bodegas with his uncle, said he had to throw away roughly \$30,000 in produce, meat, and fish. “We need to open, we need to start selling stuff,” he said.

Jessica Rinaldi/Globe Staff

Baker, who on [Friday appointed Eversource to lead the restoration of gas service](#), reiterated his frustration over the inadequacy of Columbia Gas, particularly its failure to communicate with residents and public officials clearly and early. He said Columbia will ultimately be responsible for all losses. He did not say whether a criminal investigation is warranted, only saying that an investigation of the cause is ongoing.

[One person was killed as a result of an explosion in Lawrence](#), and two dozen others were injured by blasts and fires.

Columbia [again came under fire Sunday after it set up a center for residents to file claims](#), only to become overwhelmed and turn residents away. By Monday, the claim center was reopened and seemed to be moving more efficiently.

Erica Beck, of Lawrence, said a relative had waited in line for several hours Sunday without success, but she returned the following day, saying she needed to file claims for several days of lost work while she cared for her two children. She said the line was moving swiftly on Monday.

In South Lawrence, Juan Polo, who owns two bodegas with his uncle on South Broadway, said he had to throw away roughly \$30,000 in produce, including meats and fish, cheese, milk and eggs, which spoiled when he lost electricity. At one of the bodegas, where he uses gas to cook hot foods for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, he estimates he could lose \$1,200 a day on that service alone.

“All of the meat, we just threw it out,” he said. “We need to open, we need to start selling stuff.”

Across the street, at Union Laundry, a full-service laundromat, owner Chris Fazio said he is set to lose \$12,000 a week: No hot water for washing, or gas for the drying.

“It has a domino effect,” he said. “I’m losing money hand over fist.”

Farrington, of the coffee shop, was struggling over that realization Monday.

Many of his 18 employees are single mothers who rely on tips to pay their bills.

One of his workers, Ana Gonzalez, who was out back throwing out spoiled produce, brings her son in on the weekends to work to help pay the bills.

Meantime, Farrington said, he was struggling to calculate his spoiled inventory.

“It’s the immediate loss of business,” said Farrington, who bought the restaurant from his mother 21 years ago, “But it’s the long-term clientele we’ve built up.”

Milton J. Valencia can be reached at milton.valencia@globe.com

Follow him on Twitter [@miltonvalencia](https://twitter.com/miltonvalencia)

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com

Follow him on Twitter [@mrochele](https://twitter.com/mrochele)

[Show 91 Comments](#)

Subscribe Now

Digital Access

Home Delivery

Gift Subscriptions

My Account

Manage my Account

Mobile Customer Service

Sign Up For Newsletters

Contact

Help

FAQs

Globe newsroom

Advertise

Order back issues

Social

Facebook

Twitter

Google+

More

ePaper

News in Education

Archives

Privacy policy

Terms of service

Terms of purchase

Work at Boston Globe Media