



Markey rips Columbia Gas for response to Merrimack Valley



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Senator Ed Markey questioned David Pekoske, Administrator of the Transportation Security Administration last month.

By [Travis Andersen](#)

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Columbia Gas of Massachusetts was “woefully unprepared” to respond to gas fires and explosions that rocked Lawrence, Andover, and North Andover on Sept. 13, and officials need more details on what led to the catastrophe, US Senator Ed Markey said Friday.

Markey, a Malden Democrat, delivered his remarks during a news conference in Boston, one day after

the NTSB [released preliminary findings](#) showing that Columbia Gas failed to relocate an underground pressure sensor from an abandoned pipe during construction work in Lawrence, triggering a gush of gas into the local network that erupted into explosions and fires that rocked the Merrimack Valley.

A teenager was killed, more than 20 other people were injured, and thousands of homes and businesses were left without gas heat or hot water.

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Markey said Friday that the company took three hours to shut down critical components after the initial blasts, adding that “there is in fact a lack of preparedness that was quite obvious.”

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He said in a follow-up statement posted to Facebook that “[w]e need to turn over every stone and shine a light on the workings of this company and the entire industry, so that people can both trust that their gas system is safe and verify that nothing like this will ever happen again.”

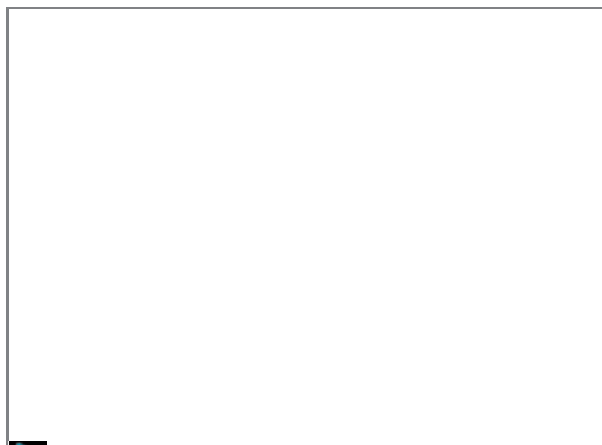
Dean Lieberman, a Columbia Gas spokesman, said in a statement that pipeline safety is “the utmost priority for NiSource and the industry.”

Lieberman said the company is “committed to helping the NTSB do its job and respect its investigation” and that “in the hours immediately after the incident we suspended similar work and enhanced procedures related to our low pressure systems. We saw these as responsible steps to take in the aftermath of the incident and while the facts were being gathered. We take this very seriously. Our actions in the incident’s aftermath align with our commitment to the safety of our customers, our communities and our employees.”

The company is also racing to replace 45 miles of pipeline that were damaged by the over-pressurization.

Retired Navy Seabee commander Joseph Albanese, tapped by the company to lead the response effort, has said crews are ahead of a self-imposed Nov. 19 deadline to replace the pipeline.

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Columbia Gas has said it will reimburse residents and businesses for all expenses and incurred losses. More than 3,000 people have been placed in temporary housing, such as hotels, apartments, and trailers. *Shelley Murphy, Milton J. Valencia, and Matt Rocheleau of the Globe Staff contributed to this report.*

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