

July 29, 2019

**COLUMBIA GAS TO PAY \$143 MILLION TO RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES
HARMED BY MERRIMACK VALLEY GAS EXPLOSIONS**

*Plaintiffs' attorneys reach Agreement-in-Principle with Columbia Gas; settlement
will compensate communities of Lawrence, Andover and North Andover*

[Lawrence, MA] – The lawyers spearheading the multiple class actions arising out of the September 13, 2018 Merrimack Valley fires and explosions today announced that they have reached an Agreement in Principle with Columbia Gas on behalf of residents and businesses in Lawrence, Andover and North Andover.

Columbia and its parent company NiSource, Inc. have agreed to pay \$143 million to the thousands of residents and businesses impacted. The proposed class action settlement will compensate those harmed for the losses and hardships they suffered as a result of these blasts and fires.

“Our aim has always been to help the affected communities and to hold Columbia Gas fully accountable for the harm to the thousands of individuals and businesses in the Merrimack Valley,” said Plaintiffs’ Co-lead Counsel, Frank Petosa of Morgan & Morgan. “This settlement – reached in an unprecedented ten months after the incident – will provide a full measure of compensation to thousands of residents and businesses in a transparent and expeditious manner, under rigorous judicial oversight.”

This settlement, which is subject to Court approval, is separate from the money paid to the towns to cover infrastructure repairs and other expenses, as well as from the individual claims involving personal injuries and wrongful death. Residents and businesses will be able to submit claims upon the settlement receiving final approval from the Court.

The Columbia Gas-managed claims process, overseen by the Court-supervised mediator, will continue until the Court gives preliminary approval to the settlement. At that time an independent claims administrator will take over the process. More information on this will be made available as soon as possible. The Court will oversee and supervise the entire claims administration process. The compensation formulas and distribution method will be open and transparent.

“We believe this settlement will do the most good for the greatest number of affected people and businesses, as quickly as possible,” said Plaintiffs’ Co-Lead Counsel, John Roddy of Bailey & Glasser. “The claims process will be simple, straightforward and tailored to correspond to the event’s impact on the claimant.”

Residents will be entitled to recover compensation for the displacement and disruption of their lives the catastrophe caused, and property damage not previously paid for by Columbia Gas. Businesses will be able to claim lost income, lost inventory and the loss of goodwill.

“These explosions devastated the communities and economy of the towns in Merrimack Valley. Families suffered for months in the gripping cold. Businesses shuttered, and lives were upended,” said Plaintiffs’ Co-Lead Counsel, Elizabeth Graham of Grant & Eisenhofer. “To this day, the people most impacted by the explosions are not fully back on their feet, but we believe this settlement is the quickest and most just method to ensure that residents and businesses are made whole again.”

On September 13, 2018, explosions rocked the towns of Lawrence, Andover, and North Andover, caused by an over-pressurization in the system owned and operated by Columbia Gas.

Judge James Lang in Essex County Superior Court in Massachusetts presided over a months’ long mediation. The settlement is subject to the Court’s final approval.

Attorneys for the Settlement Class (Plaintiffs) are Co-Lead Counsel, Frank Petosa of Morgan & Morgan; John Roddy of Bailey & Glasser, and; Elizabeth Graham of Grant & Eisenhofer; and Co-Liaison Counsel, Leo Boyle and Brad Henry of Meehan, Boyle, Black & Bogdanow.

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