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Attorneys for family of man killed in catastrophic gas explosions announce wrongful death lawsuit

Steve Cooper

BOSTON (WHDH) - Attorneys representing the family of an 18-year-old Lawrence man who was killed in a series of catastrophic gas explosions that rocked the Merrimack Valley in September announced plans to file a wrongful death lawsuit against Columbia Gas on Thursday.

Citing reckless conduct by the utility, lawyers at Sheff Law say Leonel Rondon's death on Sept. 13 could have and should have been avoided.

Rondon, who loved school, cooking and watching movies, was pulled from a crumpled car in a driveway on Chickering Road after a house explosion sent a chimney crashing down on top of him. He was later pronounced dead at a Boston hospital.

Family members say Rondon, who was set to graduate from high school this year, had just gotten his driver's license and was celebrating the milestone with two friends when he was killed.

Attorney Douglas K. Sheff says Columbia Gas must be held responsible for the tragedy.

"We need to be able to live in our homes and workplaces safely," he said at a press conference. "This puts a cloud over safety for everybody in the area."

Sheff says the lawsuit will be filed in the coming weeks. It's not yet clear if it will be filed in Suffolk County or Essex County. Financial terms were not disclosed.

Rondon's heartbroken family members say they are more concerned with helping avoid future disasters than monetary damages.

The pressure in natural gas pipelines under Lawrence, Andover, and North Andover was said 12 times higher than it should have been at the time of the blasts.

Columbia Gas says it hopes to restore service to the area by Thanksgiving.

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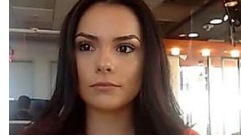
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