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Family of teen who died in gas explosions reaches settlement with Columbia gas

WCVB [5abc]

Updated: 12:19 PM EDT Jul 9, 2019

LAWRENCE, Mass. — The family a Lawrence teenager who died in the Merrimack Valley gas explosions last year has reached a settlement with Columbia Gas of Massachusetts.

Leonel Rondon, 18, died on Sept. 13 was inside a parked car outside his friend's home when a chimney fell on top of the vehicle. The high school junior had received his driver's license just hours earlier.

"He was only 18 years old and full of life. He loved science and had a passion for music. He dreamt of going to college and cared for his family members in every way possible. His

mother, Rosaly, described Leonel as 'the happiness of the house,'" said Doug Sheff, the family's attorney.

The amount of the settlement is confidential, per the terms of the agreement.

"We remain heartbroken over the tragic loss of Leonel Rondon and again express our deepest sympathy to his family and to the entire community," said Joe Hamrock, CEO and President of NiSource Inc., the parent company of Columbia Gas. "We recognize the pain that remains and understand that nothing we can ever say or do will bring Leonel back to his loved ones or erase that pain."

Sheff Law will said it plans to establish a scholarship fund designed to encourage an ongoing interest in public safety and community service.

Columbia Gas will also set up a scholarship fund in Rondon's name, independent of the settlement announced.

The explosions and fires in the Merrimack Valley communities of Lawrence, Andover and North Andover also injured about 25 other people and damaged or destroyed more than 100 homes.

Thousands of homes and businesses in the region were without natural gas service for weeks or months after the disaster.

Investigators from the National Transportation Safety Board blamed the explosions on overpressurization of gas lines in the area.