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Family of young man killed in Merrimack Valley gas disaster reaches settlement with Columbia Gas

Owen Ross

BOSTON (WHDH) - The family of a young man who was killed during last year's Merrimack Valley gas disaster has reached a confidential settlement with Columbia Gas, their attorney announced Tuesday.

The settlement is the result of voluntary mediation between the gas company and the family of Leonel Rondon, 18, who was killed on Sept. 13, 2018, when a house explosion sent a chimney falling onto his vehicle.

Family members say Rondon, who was sitting in a car outside 35 Chickering Road, had recently obtained his driver's license and was sitting in the car with two friends, both of whom were hospitalized.

In a statement, the family's attorney Doug Sheff, said, "Leonel tragically lost his life when a chimney from a nearby house fell onto a car. 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.' The family can only hope that this kind of catastrophe will never happen again."

He continued, "Nothing can replace the loss of Leonel and the Rondons will continue to cherish his memory, his loving support and positive impact on his family and community. Sheff Law will establish a scholarship fund designed to encourage an ongoing interest in public safety and community service."

Joe Hamrock, President and CEO of NiSource Inc., Columbia Gas' parent company, said in a statement, "We remain heartbroken over the tragic loss of Leonel Rondon and again express our deepest sympathy to his family and to the entire community. 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. Since this tragic event, we have always wanted to do the right thing for the Rondon family and all of those affected, and we are pleased to have reached this settlement."

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

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