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# Pipeline safety act included in massive COVID-19 bill

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Tucked into the roughly \$900 billion coronavirus relief package that Congress passed late Monday is a gas pipeline safety provision that U.S. Sen. Edward Markey has been trying to get enacted for two years.

Markey's Leonel Rondon Pipeline Safety Act, which is named for the 18-year-old man who was killed as a result of the explosions and fires that rocked Lawrence, Andover and North Andover on Sept. 13, 2018, is poised to become law with the passage of the spending plan and President Donald Trump's signature, his office said.

"The passage of this legislation is a critical step in ensuring that we prioritize public safety over corporate profit and never allow a tragic disaster like this to happen again," Markey said about the bill that would require on-site monitoring of gas system pressure during construction, seek to improve emergency response coordination, require gas distributors to produce complete maps and records of key pressure controls, and more.

U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, U. S. Reps. Seth Moulton and Lori Trahan, Lawrence Mayor Dan Rivera and state Sen. Barry Finegold also celebrated the inclusion of the measures in the spending and relief bill Monday.

The natural gas disaster in the Merrimack Valley killed Leonel Rondon, injured 22 other people, damaged more than 130 homes and businesses, and prompted a 2018 state law requiring the review and approval by a certified professional engineer of all natural gas work that could pose a public safety risk.

Columbia Gas, the natural gas provider in the area, accepted responsibility, pleaded guilty to a federal felony charge of violating a minimum safety standard in the federal Natural Gas Pipeline Safety Act, and saw its assets in Massachusetts sold off to Eversource Energy.

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