



**Credible.
Independent.
In the public interest.**

300 North Commercial St, Suite B, Bellingham, WA 98225 Phone 360-543-5686 Fax 360-543-0978 <http://pipelinesafetytrust.org>

**For Immediate Release
9/14/2018**

**Contact: Carl Weimer, Executive Director
carl@pstrust.org**

Statement on Gas Tragedy in Massachusetts

Our thoughts are with the people in Andover, North Andover, and Lawrence, Massachusetts that have been displaced and terrorized by this serious gas system failure.

At this point we have seen no credible evidence or even accurate descriptions of how these failures occurred that would allow us to speculate on what happened and why. The best source of accurate information at this early stage would be the operator of the pipeline system Columbia Gas, or the state and federal investigators. We are also relieved to hear that the NTSB will be investigating this tragedy since we completely trust the thorough and accurate work of that agency.

There has been some mention in the press that there may have been some over-pressurization of the system. In general terms natural gas is delivered to a community in a high pressure (200-1400psi) gas transmission pipeline. It is then transferred from the high pressure pipeline through various "step down" regulators to decrease the pressure into the gas distribution system where it flows out to homes and businesses through gas mains, that usually operate at pressures well under 200psi. From the gas main the gas flows to individual homes and businesses where it normally goes through a final meter and regulator that decreases the pressure further, typically under 10psi. If for some reason the pressure in the pipe anywhere in the system increases significantly above these normal operating pressures, these regulators are supposed to be able to limit the pressure that gets past them. If these individual regulators at homes for some reason fail to keep the pressure entering homes to very low levels weaknesses in the piping system within the homes could fail, or individual appliances could malfunction.

To reiterate, we have seen no credible source stating that over-pressurization was the cause of this terrible tragedy in Massachusetts, so the above description is just provided for background to help people understand the pertinent parts of the distribution system. Hopefully the company and the state and federal safety investigators will provide more information soon.

We also hope that if the problem demonstrated so dramatically here is something that could occur in other areas of the country that the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration will soon release national guidance or safety orders to ensure the safety of us all.

The Pipeline Safety Trust is the only national non-profit organization that acts in the public interest to promote pipeline safety through education and advocacy, by increasing access to information, and by building partnerships with residents, safety advocates, government, and industry, that result in safer communities and a healthier environment. We originated from a pipeline tragedy in Bellingham, Washington in 1999.