



Lawsuit Filed in NJ House Explosion

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An attorney has filed a civil suit on behalf of the family of the woman killed in the Ewing Township gas explosion following his law firm's nearly month-long investigation.

"Our investigation has uncovered a series of glaring mistakes that began long before the gas line was struck and continued up through the time of the explosion," said Tom Kline, an attorney with Philadelphia-based firm Kline & Specter.

The lawsuit claims the Public Electric Service & Gas Co. and the on-site workers with the Blue Bell, Pa.-base contractor Henkels & McCoy Inc. were negligent and reckless, according to a news release.

The suit goes on to say PSE&G failed to correctly identify the gas line's location and Henkels & McCoy's workers did not call 911, turn off the gas or try to evacuate residents despite knowing the gas line had been compromised.

"The failure to follow basic safety procedures led directly to Linda Cerritelli's death," Kline said. "This lawsuit will be an important tool to hold parties accountable and to hopefully prevent a similar catastrophe in the future."

Kline announced in March that his firm would conduct its own investigation into the cause of the explosion that killed 62-year-old Cerritelli and injured seven other people on March 4.

Workers with Henkels & McCoy were replacing electric service to a home in a Ewing Township townhouse complex on Crockett Lane when they accidentally struck and damaged a gas line, according to officials with PSE&G.

According to Ewing Township Mayor Bert Steinmann, the workers called PSE&G officials to report that they damaged the gas line. However, Steinmann claims the workers never called 911.

"Had that 911 come in at the time that the gas line was hit and if we responded, some of the response may have been a little different," Steinmann said.

About an hour after the line was struck, "ignition" occurred. The blast destroyed the home, killed the homeowner, Cerritelli, injured seven utility workers and damaged more than 50 other houses.

The seven people injured in the blast were all PSE&G workers. None of their injuries were life-threatening, according to officials.

A criminal investigation into the blast was complete and no charges were be filed against Henkels & McCoy, according to Steinman. More concerns over Henkels & McCoy's procedures arose after records revealed the Occupational Safety and Health

Administration cited the firm for violations involving signaling, warning signs and protection of workers during evacuations.

Records provided by the OSHA show that Henkels & McCoy was fined \$70,000 in March 2013 for safety violations at a site in Bayonne and \$42,000 for violations in Neptune in August

In March, PSE&G officials said it never had any problems with the construction firm.

A representatives for Henkels & McCoy did not immediately respond to requests for comment. A PSE&G spokeswoman said the utility company does not comment on pending litigation.