

Another Gas Scare in Merrimack Valley

A year after a several communities in Massachusetts were devastated by natural gas explosions, the Merrimack Valley region has once again been jolted by a gas scare. [This morning](#), officials evacuated and cut power service to homes in Lawrence after a gas leak was discovered.

The leak comes after repeated calls to reduce gas consumption and install additional safeguards to prevent further tragedy in the aftermath of the Merrimack Valley disaster, which killed one person and left thousands without gas services.

After investigating the 2018 explosions, the National Transportation Safety Board this month recommended [stronger regulations](#) of gas infrastructure nationwide. The federal agency cited engineering errors in pressure-sensing devices as the cause of the explosions and scolded Columbia Gas for poor communication and weak management.

[Gas Leaks Allies](#), a coalition of more than 20 organizations and researchers focused on reducing methane emissions, marked the one-year anniversary of the explosions earlier this month with the release of a report entitled, [Rolling the Dice: Assessment of Gas System Safety in Massachusetts](#).

The report calls for avoiding large investment in the current gas distribution system and instead using the planned funding to transition away from gas. Here are the highlights:

- As in many other states, Massachusetts gas companies are replacing outdated, leak prone iron and steel gas pipes. Ratepayers are currently committed to spend \$9.3 billion to replace about one-quarter of the gas system, or 5,408 miles, by 2033 through the Massachusetts Gas System Enhancement Plan (GSEP).
- Under the goals of the [Global Warming Solutions Act](#) and [Boston Climate Action Plan](#), however, the gas system should be replaced by carbon-neutral alternatives by 2033, the year GSEP is scheduled for completion. This shift would potentially leave the pipes abandoned in the ground, while ratepayers continue to pay for them.
- The report offers more than 50 recommendations to prioritize the largest and most hazardous leaks for repair, not pipe replacement, while working to transition away from gas.

While events like the Merrimack Valley explosions make headlines, serious safety incidents are relatively commonplace across the nation. To improve public awareness, Climate Nexus has created an [interactive map](#) using data collected by the federal Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA).

Since the Merrimack gas explosion on September 13 of last year and through August 30, 2019, PHMSA has recorded 141 additional significant events resulting in eight deaths and more than 50 injuries.

GAS LEAKS **ALLIES**

PHMSA defines significant incidents or events as those that result in fatality, injury, or total property damage of \$50,000 or more in 1984 dollars.

If you have any questions on this information or would like to speak to an expert, please let me know.

Thank you,

Sarah Griffith
Communications Lead
gasleaksallies@gmail.com