

STATE OF NEW YORK

# Public Service Commission

Garry A. Brown, Chairman

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## **COMMISSION UPDATED ON FLORAL PARK INVESTIGATION — Serious Questions Raised in Regards to Queens’ Gas Explosion, Hearings to be Held —**

Albany, NY—11/12/09—The New York State Public Service Commission (Commission) today received a briefing from Department of Public Service staff on the findings of staff’s investigation in the matter of the natural gas explosion in Queens in April within the Consolidated Edison Company of New York, Inc. service territory.

“I’d like to acknowledge staff for doing such a thorough investigation into this tragic gas explosion in Floral Park which cost the life of one person, and to note that staff has been actively involved in investigating the explosion and Con Edison’s response since it occurred,” said Commission Chairman Garry Brown. “The next step will be to give the public and other interested parties an opportunity to offer comments and suggestions regarding the company’s emergency response procedures and how procedures can be improved. Con Edison will also be directed to address the Commission’s broader concerns about whether the company’s internal systems, controls and management oversight are adequately designed to enforce existing procedures, detect weaknesses, and implement improvements.”

The staff investigation stems from a natural gas explosion which occurred at 80-50 260th Street in Queens, New York, on April 24, 2009. One individual died and several others sustained injuries. The Commission initiated a proceeding to investigate the explosion and it has established a public process to be followed to ensure an opportunity for the public to participate in the proceeding and comment on the issues raised by this event.

Pursuant to Commission rules, Con Edison was required to submit a report on the incident. The company's report included a description of the incident, Con Edison's response, and results and findings of Con Edison's investigation.

Department staff reviewed Con Edison's report and it now has completed its own investigation and will issue a Staff report. The next step in this process will be to make the Staff report available to the public on the Department's website. An administrative law judge will convene public statement hearings to take oral and written public comments or statements on Con Edison's report, the Department staff's report, and any other matters relating to this case. The schedule for the public statement hearings will be listed on the Department's website.

As a result of its investigation, staff today made the following recommendations to the Commission for consideration:

- **Customer Service Representative (CSR) Scripts:** Con Edison should modify the script used by CSRs when handling gas leak/odor reports to have the CSR obtain a confirmation that the caller understands the instructions and intends to evacuate. If the caller does not answer affirmatively, the CSR should re-emphasize the hazard.
- **Ability to Contact Personnel:** Con Edison should take appropriate action to review and revise, as necessary, its policies regarding the ability to immediately contact all on-duty employees whose duties include responding to emergency situations, including provisions that such personnel have their communication devices with them at all times while on duty. Con Edison should also equip its personnel with communication devices that provide better coverage in "blind spots" such as basements.
- **Dispatching Policies and Procedures:** Con Edison should conduct an analysis of its policies and procedures for dispatching personnel to emergencies with emphasis on giving higher priority to emergencies than to routine matters. The analysis should examine, but not be limited to, the issues discussed in Staff's report such as minimizing distractions due to unrelated routine calls, and balancing employee proximity to the emergency versus routine matters. For example, the company should perform an analysis of the approach of having personnel strategically placed throughout the territory during each shift who are assigned routine work that can be set aside if an emergency arises. The company should respond in writing to the Department providing its analysis and results and a description of recommended changes.
- **Identification of Buildings Connected to Subsurface Structures:** Con Edison should enhance the procedure to identify buildings and structures connected through subsurface electric facilities and provide guidance to field crews, by specifying that employees have

this information available early in the dispatching process, so that it is available to the responder upon arrival at the scene.

- **Leak Investigation Procedures:** Con Edison should add provisions to its leak investigation procedures to provide better clarity and direction regarding which and how many buildings on both sides of the street adjacent to a manhole in an urban setting will be checked in the event positive gas readings are found within subsurface structures.
- **Equipment:** Con Edison should create a first responder checklist of required tools and equipment, including but not limited to those mentioned in staff's report such as radios, cones, waffles, barricades and manhole cover lifting devices, etc. The list should be reviewed and updated as needed, and the company should periodically verify that all mechanics are properly equipped.
- **Combined Gas and Electric Events:** Con Edison should implement a process to identify reports of electric and gas problems occurring at approximately the same time in close geographic proximity. In such situations, additional company personnel and the Fire Department will be immediately dispatched.
- **Electric and Gas Facility Separation:** Con Edison should document discovered instances of insufficient clearance between facilities, and the actions taken to correct the situation.
- **Facilities Replacement:** Con Edison should make proximity to gas facilities a priority for replacement when exposed electric conduit is found in a deteriorating condition.

After evaluating the reports, public comments and input to the Secretary to the Commission, and Department staff's recommendations, the Commission will make any further determinations required for the disposition of issues which may be associated with this matter.

The Commission's notice regarding the gas explosion and other related documents may be obtained by going to the Commission Documents section of the Commission's Web site at [www.dps.state.ny.us](http://www.dps.state.ny.us) and entering Case Number 09-G-0380 in the input box labeled "Search for Case/Matter Number." Many libraries offer free Internet access. Commission orders may also be obtained from the Commission's Files Office, 14th floor, Three Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY, 12223, or calling 518-474-2500.