

Gas explosion kills Michigan man

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A retired auto worker was killed last Wednesday in the suburban Detroit neighborhood of Royal Oak, when a gas explosion leveled his house and shattered windows for blocks around. 58-year-old Daniel Malczynski died of “multiple blast-type injuries” according to the Oakland County medical examiner. He was apparently standing outside his home on Cooper Avenue when a gas leak ignited, demolishing his home and rocking the entire neighborhood.

Consumers Energy work crews had been in the neighborhood doing maintenance on the gas lines. After the blast, a neighbor, Dan Jones, 67, told the press, “Basically, they were putting a new gas main line under the sidewalk, and then they were going to be tying into each house. They were here working until about 4:30 this afternoon, with all their trucks and their digging equipment.” The blast occurred only minutes later, just before 5 p.m.

According to some media sources, neighbors smelled gas in the area just before the explosion.

Debra Dodd, a spokesperson for Consumers Energy, the natural gas utility company serving the area, told the local CBS radio station, “They were doing part of a typical civic improvement project. They were replacing a gas main on that street and had been out there for several days.”

On February 28, Consumers Energy issued an official statement on the incident. It states, “Consumers Energy is cooperating with the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) and other regulatory agencies in an investigation of this incident. Preliminary testing has determined that a gas service line to the house was damaged and was the possible cause of the explosion. However, the investigation is continuing under the supervision of the MPSC. Consumers Energy is in the process of testing other gas services in the vicinity of the incident and is committed to assuring all of its facilities are safe and intact before restoring gas service

to the area.”

Due to the direct involvement and admitted culpability of the utility company, measures were taken to provide temporary housing and transportation for those displaced from their homes and vehicles. One can be sure however, that any information produced from the investigation into the incident will be carefully vetted in favor of protecting the interests of Consumers Energy’s shareholders.

MPSC investigators were on the scene as early as the day after the blast, but as the *Detroit Free Press* reported, “any investigation into the cause of the blast could take considerable time. The public service commission has not completed its investigation into the December 29, 2010 explosion that destroyed the William C. Franks Furniture store in the Detroit suburb of Wayne and killed two employees and injured the owner. Consumers Energy, which was involved in that case as well, said its own year-long investigation left the cause undetermined.”

That furniture store explosion actually occurred more than two years ago—meaning that the MPSC investigation was concluded with no information being made public.

The WSWS reported on the MPSC investigation into the role of private utility company DTE and its electrical division Detroit Edison in the fires that swept through Detroit residential neighborhoods, destroying 85 buildings during the violent windstorm of 7 September 2010. The 12-week investigation completely exonerated the corporation of any blame in either the cause of the fires or their lack of response to residential customer calls complaining of poorly maintained cables and transformers.

The WSWS, along with the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs (CAUS) interviewed several residents in the neighborhoods hit by the blazes who recounted episodes in the days and weeks prior to the fires,

futilely trying to get DTE to send crews to their neighborhoods to repair dangerous connections.

Another telling practice was the ordering of the immediate razing of the burned homes by Detroit Mayor Dave Bing, a twenty-year member of DTE's board of directors before becoming mayor. This, in contrast to the longstanding practice of the city of Detroit of leaving burned homes stand in neighborhoods for years, amounted to the destruction of evidence. The MPSC, even though it immediately announced its investigation, raised no objection.

In the gas explosion of September 2010 in the residential neighborhood of Crestwood, in San Bruno, California, which killed eight and injured dozens, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) took complete control of the investigation into the role of Pacific Gas and Electric Co. (PG&E). Months later, the NTSB complained about the lack of cooperation by PG&E in providing records and information.

The source of the explosion in San Bruno was a 50-year-old 30-inch steel gas main. Numerous defective welds were found in the pipe, which was originally installed in 1956. As PG&E continually increased pressure to meet growing demand, the weak welds eventually gave out. The NTSC uncovered evidence covered up by PG&E for nine months of the investigation that there had been a gas leak in 1988 in the same pipeline that caused the explosion in 2010.

In January of 2012, an audit from the State of California found that PG&E illegally appropriated over \$100 million from a fund designated for safety operations and used it for executive compensation and bonuses. PG&E is currently engaged in lawsuits from over 100 plaintiffs as a result of the explosion. The company announced a program of modernization of its infrastructure, which will be funded by an increase in gas rates.

Several gas explosions occurred in Pennsylvania and Ohio as a result of decaying infrastructure since the San Bruno disaster.



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