

FOUR LAWSUITS FILED ON BEHALF OF THOSE KILLED OR INJURED IN DURHAM EXPLOSION

Four lawsuits were filed today on behalf of people killed or injured in the April 10, 2019, gas explosion in downtown Durham.

The lawsuits, filed by the Raleigh law firm of Edwards Kirby, LLP, allege eight different companies were negligent, leading to the explosion.

One of the suits was filed on behalf of the family of Kong Y. Lee, the owner of the Kaffeinate coffee shop that was at the site of the explosion.

The explosion occurred after a drilling company that was hired as part of project to lay fiber cable in downtown Durham struck a $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch high pressure gas line while drilling around 9 am on April 10, the suit says. The gas line was located just outside the Kaffeinate coffee shop. No one from the company called 911 to report the gas leak, the lawsuit says.

The gas leak lasted for more than an hour before the explosion occurred. Two people were killed and at least 25 were injured. Eighteen buildings were damaged by the blast and the fire that followed, with two having been condemned.

In addition to Mr. Lee's estate, the other people who filed suit Monday were:

- Richard V. Meyers of Raleigh, a bus driver who was pulling up across from the coffee shop when the explosion occurred;
- Katrics Edwards of Selma, who was walking to the coffee shop for a cup of coffee when the explosion happened; and
- Jasper O. Poole of Durham, who had been trying to deliver flowers in the area when the explosion occurred.

“This tragedy was caused by a cascade of errors,” said David Kirby, one of the lawyers who filed the suits. “The gas line would not have been ruptured if standard safety protocols were followed by all the contractors involved in the planning and execution of a major underground cable installation project in downtown Durham. Things only got worse when no one immediately called 911 to report a major gas leak that could have been shut off preventing the explosion.”

The lawsuit alleges that the drilling company was required to dig a hole in the area to locate the gas lines and other utilities, but failed to do so that day. Instead, the company began drilling without taking the necessary safety precautions.

The companies sued are:

- Optic Cable Technology, a Durham company that was operating the drill when it struck the gas line;
- PS Splicing, an Oxford, N.C. company that hired Optic Cable Technology;
- Crown Castle Fiber and three other related fiber technology companies that the suit says were in charge of the project;
- Tower Engineering Professionals, a Raleigh engineering company that was the engineer for the project; and
- Public Service Gas Company of North Carolina, which the suit says failed to adequately respond once the gas leak was discovered.

The lawsuits ask for unspecified damages.

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