

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

Merrimack Valley

Massachusetts Explosions
September 24, 2018

When Communications Fall Short

At Mutualink, we envision a world in which all emergency responders and the communities they serve communicate as needed with full interoperability. Connecting voice, video and data for ad hoc response and coordination makes communities safer. But what happens when communications fall short? Coordination within and between departments and agencies become inefficient. Time is wasted and lives put at risk.

On September 24, 2019, the National Transportation Safety Board published the attached synopsis of their report on the “Overpressurization of Natural Gas Distribution System, Explosions, and Fires in Merrimack Valley, Massachusetts September 13, 2018”. Highlights of the Findings and Recommendations follows:

HIGHLIGHTS of the FINDINGS

*The field radio communications used across fire departments on September 13 **lacked adequate interoperability and availability to ensure that emergency responders had efficient means of interdepartmental and intradepartmental communications.***

*The **communications issues** during the September 13 overpressurization illustrate the need for emergency planning for a multi-jurisdictional response.*

*The Columbia Gas of Massachusetts incident commander faced multiple competing priorities, such as **communicating with affected municipalities, updating the emergency responders,** and shutting down the natural gas distribution system, which adversely affected his ability to complete his tasks in a timely manner.*

(Editorial Note: boldface added by Mutualink)

RECOMMENDATIONS

***To the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security:** Develop guidance that includes a component for effective communications when deploying mutual aid resources within the first hours of a multi-jurisdictional incident.*

***To NiSource, Inc.:** Review your protocols and training for responding to large-scale emergency events, including providing timely information to emergency responders, appropriately assigning NiSource emergency response duties, performing multi-jurisdictional training exercises, and participating cooperatively with municipal emergency management agencies.*