

PLEASE NOTE: Legislative Information **cannot** perform research, provide legal advice, or interpret Maine law. For legal assistance, please contact a qualified attorney.

## **An Act To Improve Response to Gas Safety Emergencies**

**Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:**

**Sec. 1. 25 MRSA §2394**, as amended by PL 1973, c. 632, §4, is further amended to read:

### **§ 2394. Investigation of fire origin; Attorney General may direct**

When property is destroyed or damaged by fire, the municipal fire inspector shall investigate the cause, circumstances and origin of the fire, and especially examine whether it was the result of carelessness or of design. The Attorney General may supervise and direct such investigation whenever he deems it the Attorney General determines it to be expedient or necessary. If arson is suspected, such the municipal fire inspector shall immediately notify the State Fire Marshal or an inspector of his office the Office of the State Fire Marshal, who shall cause a full investigation thereof to be conducted. The State Fire Marshal and his agents or employees shall have the authority to of the Office of the State Fire Marshal may investigate or cause to be investigated any fire or explosion within the State.

**1. Certain explosions or fires; investigation and securing of evidence.** In accordance with the protocol adopted by the State Fire Marshal pursuant to this subsection, the State Fire Marshal shall investigate and secure evidence of a gas explosion event. For purposes of this subsection, "gas explosion event" means an explosion or fire caused or suspected to be caused by or that involves natural gas or liquefied petroleum gas and that causes injury or substantial property damage, as determined according to the protocol adopted under this subsection. The State Fire Marshal shall develop a protocol for investigating and securing evidence under this section that:

A. Establishes reasonable standards for determining whether an explosion or fire may have been caused by or involved natural gas or liquefied petroleum gas and whether the explosion or fire caused injury or substantial property damage; and

B. Establishes procedures for informing local fire officials of the requirements of this subsection and for coordinating the investigation, as appropriate, with local fire officials, the Public Utilities Commission, the utility or other entity that controlled, transported or delivered the natural gas or liquefied petroleum gas and other relevant entities.

**Sec. 2. 35-A MRSA §117, sub-§3**, as corrected by RR 2009, c. 2, §98, is amended to read:

**3. Administrative penalties.** Except as provided in this subsection, all administrative penalties collected by the commission must be deposited into the Public Utilities Commission Reimbursement Fund.

A. The commission may use amounts collected as administrative penalties and deposited in the Public Utilities Commission Reimbursement Fund to reimburse the commission for additional expenses associated with the enforcement activities that resulted in the collection of the penalty. If

the Department of Public Safety, Office of the State Fire Marshal undertakes an investigation of a gas explosion event pursuant to Title 25, section 2394, subsection 1 involving a gas utility or a natural gas pipeline utility subject to the jurisdiction of the commission, the commission, at the request of the State Fire Marshal, may reimburse the Office of the State Fire Marshal for its additional expenses associated with that investigation.

B. After deducting any amount used pursuant to paragraph A, the commission may, to the extent practicable and in as equitable and fair a manner as possible, apply administrative penalties, along with any accrued interest, in accordance with this paragraph. The commission shall seek to apply the amount in a manner that benefits those customers affected or potentially affected by the violation, if they can reasonably be identified or, if the commission determines this application of the amount to be impractical or unreasonable, in a manner that benefits the class or group of customers affected or potentially affected by the violation. In order to achieve the purposes of this paragraph, the commission may apply the funds:

- (1) In the form of a direct payment or credit to the customers or group or class of customers affected or potentially affected by the violation resulting in the administrative penalty;
- (2) To supplement a low-income assistance or outreach program that the commission determines would benefit customers affected or potentially affected by the violation resulting in the administrative penalty;
- (3) To supplement the conservation program fund established pursuant to section 10110, subsection 7;
- (4) To supplement the telecommunications education access fund established pursuant to section 7104#B; or
- (5) To supplement any other program or fund that the commission determines would benefit customers affected or potentially affected by the violation.

Amounts applied pursuant to this paragraph to supplement an existing program or fund may not result in a reduction in other funding provided for the program or fund unless the reduction is outside the commission's control and the commission finds that application of the penalty amount to the fund or program is the most appropriate use of the penalty and the net effect will be an increase in total funding available to the program or fund.

In any final order issued by the commission approving or denying the application of administrative penalties to benefit any person affected or potentially affected by the violation, the commission shall make specific findings of fact supporting the commission's decision, including findings supporting any amount the commission approves as well as findings supporting the commission's denial of amounts requested by any person.

**Sec. 3. 35-A MRSA §4712** is enacted to read:

**§ 4712. Gas emergency response**

**1. Definitions.** As used in this section, unless the context otherwise indicates, "gas explosion event" means an explosion or fire that causes property damage or personal injury and that involves natural gas or liquefied petroleum gas controlled, transported or delivered by a gas utility or a natural gas pipeline utility subject to the jurisdiction of the commission.

**2. Response.** Following a gas explosion event, the commission shall immediately contact the State Fire Marshal:

A. To confirm that the State Fire Marshal is investigating the event and securing evidence in accordance with Title 25, section 2394, subsection 1 and to coordinate the commission's activities with the State Fire Marshal's investigation; or

B. To confirm that the event does not warrant investigation by the State Fire Marshal pursuant to the protocol established in accordance with Title 25, section 2394, subsection 1.

**3. Proceedings.** In any commission proceeding concerning a gas explosion event, the commission shall afford a person injured by the event or who suffered property damage in the event an opportunity to address the commission regarding the event.

**4. Compensation.** In determining pursuant to section 117 whether to apply any administrative penalties relating to the gas explosion event to benefit customers affected or potentially affected by the violation, and in determining the amount to apply, the commission shall consider documented property damages suffered by a person as a result of the event and may apply an amount to equitably compensate that person for losses not otherwise fully compensated.

Effective 90 days following adjournment of the 125th  
Legislature, First Regular Session, unless otherwise indicated.