



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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**Gale A. Brewer, Borough President**

March 18, 2016

Vicki Been  
Commissioner  
NYC Housing Preservation & Development  
100 Gold Street  
New York, NY 10038

Hon. Eric Schneiderman  
Attorney General  
Office of the Attorney General of New York  
The Capitol  
Albany, NY 12224

Rick D. Chandler, P.E.  
Commissioner  
Department of Buildings  
280 Broadway  
New York, NY 10007

Kathleen H. Burgess  
Secretary to the Commission  
New York State Public Service Commission  
3 Empire State Plaza  
Albany, NY 12223

James Rubin  
Commissioner  
Homes & Community Renewal  
25 Beaver Street  
New York, NY 10004

John McAvoy  
CEO of Consolidated Edison  
Consolidated Edison Inc.  
4 Irving Place  
New York, NY 10003

Dear Commissioners Chandler, Been and Rubin, Attorney General Schneiderman, Secretary Burgess, and Mr. McAvoy:

I write on behalf of many residents that have complained to my office about gas outages and the impact these outages are having on their lives. Both from the volume of complaints my office has received and from the reports I've heard from housing advocates and through the media, it appears that Manhattan buildings are seeing a dramatic increase in long-term gas shut-offs.

My office is currently working with three buildings that have not had gas service for months. These buildings are:

- 10 West 135 Street – without gas since December 2015
- 3440 Broadway –without gas since July 2015
- 72 Thompson Street –without gas since September 2015

I also want to acknowledge the many residents whose buildings have recently appeared in the news because of long-term gas outages, especially residents who reside at 129 East 97th Street. The enclosed DNAinfo, article dated February 18, 2016, informed me that residents there have been without gas for 10 months. When will these residents have their gas restored? Is a Tenant Protection Plan in place at this site? What hurdles are encountered by the agencies that do not allow gas to be restored in a reasonable time frame?

Straus Media's recent coverage discusses other gas outages on the Lower East Side ("Out of Gas," March 2), and describes an overall increase in gas shut-offs throughout the city. I am requesting an

updated list of buildings that are currently without gas service and the steps that are being undertaken by DOB, Con Ed, HPD and any other agency to ensure that gas in these buildings is being restored in a timely fashion.

Finally, I'd like know more broadly what additional enforcement, regulatory, or other action we can collectively pursue to reduce the number and length of these gas service suspensions. Manhattan's residents – especially those with low or fixed incomes – must have cooking gas to feed themselves affordably. Hot plates are not an acceptable long-term substitute. There must be clear standards and a robust process to ensure outages of this required service are remedied and customers' service is restored without undue delay.

Please review the issues outlined in the enclosed articles and update me with your findings and next steps. If you have questions, contact Rosalba Rodriguez, Deputy Director, Northern Manhattan Office, at (212) 531-1609.

Sincerely,

  
Gale A. Brewer

Enclosure

cc/rr: Jon Houston, Communications Director, MBPO  
Athena Moore, Director, Northern Manhattan Office, MBPO



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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

January 22, 2016

Vikki Been  
Commissioner  
Housing Preservation and Development  
100 Gold St.  
New York, N.Y. 10038

Rick D. Chandler, P.E.  
Commissioner  
Department of Building  
280 Broadway  
New York, N.Y. 10007

John McAvoy  
CEO of Consolidated Edison  
Consolidated Edison Inc.  
4 Irving Place  
New York, NY 10003

Dear Commissioners Been, Chandler and Mr. McAvoy:

I am writing on behalf of tenants residing at Lenox Terrace, 10 West 135<sup>th</sup> Street, who have contacted my office regarding a gas outage.

It was initially reported that the outage occurred in the E-line of building 10 and has been in effect since last week. I am now informed that this issue is not isolated to the E-line, so in addition to the E-line being shut off, gas in the entire building has been shut down by Con Edison.

I have reached out to the tenant association and management office of Lenox Terrace and received the update that tenants have been provided hot plates and that arrangements have been made for the plumbers to begin commencing required work. However, the tenants remain concerned that 300 apartments have been affected in all and there has been no clear indication given regarding the source of the problem and the timeline for completion of the necessary repairs to restore gas to the building.

I am requesting a full inspection and investigation of the reported concerns, and an update to my office regarding the timeline for the repair work that must be performed to ensure the problems do not persist.

# Out of Gas

By Daniel Fitzsimmons Published Mar 2, 2016 at 11:00 am (Updated Mar 2, 2016)  
<http://www.ourtownny.com/local-news/20160302/out-of-gas>

## A surge of gas shutoffs, particularly for rent-stabilized tenants



53 Ludlow Street, where a dozen tenants, including Ruby Mak and her mom, have been without cooking gas since last September.

In less than a week of reporting this story, this newspaper was approached by no fewer than four advocacy organizations, one elected official's office, and a number of housing lawyers who were eager to talk about the issue of skyrocketing gas shutoffs and how the city's less scrupulous landlords are exploiting the situation.

Ruby Mak has been spending more money on takeout than a doctorate student mid-dissertation, and her new rice cooker is working at least as hard. "A lot of it is just out of pocket, going out to eat a lot more," said Mak. "When we cook at home it's just a rice cooker. You can steam things with it, or make rice, basically."

Last September her building joined hundreds of others across the city with no natural gas, cut off by Con Edison after an inspection blitz by the city's Dept. of Buildings that began last April, less than a month after a fatal gas explosion in the East Village that claimed two lives. According to statistics provided by the DOB, ConEd reported 343 shutoffs to the agency in 2015, a 400 percent increase over 2014's 67 shutoffs. And the upward trend appears to be increasing even more: So far in 2016 there have been 157 shutoffs, according to the DOB.

"Since the spring of last year we started noticing a lot of people coming in that had no gas, either cooking gas or heat and hot water," said Donna Chiu, director of housing and community services for Asian Americans For Equality. Chiu called the increase "freakish," and said AAFE is working with Mak's building and almost a dozen others in Chinatown and the Lower East Side to restore services. And Chiu, like many housing advocates, has witnessed a pattern of exploitation by building owners who prolong service interruptions in an effort to pressure rent-stabilized tenants into leaving their apartments.

The dozen or so residents in Mak's building, at 53 Ludlow Street, brought a Housing Part action in court - or HP in housing parlance, the part of the law used to force a landlord to make repairs or mitigate a loss of services.

from the landlord a voluntary rent abatement of 10 to 25 percent the monthly rent, but in order for the landlord to do anything, in his experience, they must be taken to court. "The thing I have to emphasize is that unless you bring them to court they're going to drag their feet," he said.

Brandon Kielbasa, director of organizing and policy at the Cooper Square Committee, is seeing the same thing Himmelstein is. "We've seen a huge uptick," he said. "Many of the buildings are those that have recently had major gut renovation construction occur in them. Many of the buildings are owned by aggressive, bad acting landlords." Kielbasa said cooking gas disruptions are a "huge disturbance" for tenants that are left without the means to prepare meals at home, and emphasized that tenants who organize tend to get gas restored much sooner than those that don't.

"So, we usually urge all tenants facing cooking gas issues to quickly initiate a HP action in housing court to get gas restored," said Kielbasa. "From our experience a housing court case is essential to open the lines of communication with a bad acting landlord and to also start putting pressure on the landlord to restore the gas in a timely way." And few would argue with the DOB's overabundance of caution concerning gas leaks, and the disasters that rarely, but tragically, accompany them. The East Village explosion that occurred on March 26 of last year claimed two lives, and followed a March 2014 gas explosion in East Harlem that claimed eight lives.

But in less than a week of reporting this story, this newspaper was approached by no fewer than four advocacy organizations, one elected official's office, and a number of housing lawyers who were eager to talk about the issue of skyrocketing gas shutoffs and how the city's less scrupulous landlords are exploiting the situation.

All told, in three days we were informed of over 20 buildings in Manhattan and Brooklyn comprising hundreds of units – many of which are rent stabilized and occupied by tenants on fixed incomes - that are enduring gas shutoff conditions. The DOB's own statistics illustrate the drastic increase: 67 shutoffs in 2014, 343 in 2015, and 157 in January and February of this year. The agency is inspecting five times as many buildings for faulty or illegal gas hookups than before the East Village explosion last March.

Con Ed referred DNAinfo New York to the building's owner, the Sigety family, for information on the status of the work, but the Sigety's did not immediately return a request for comment.

The roommates said they've had to pester Peter Camilleri of the Mautner-Glick Corporation, which manages the building, to get any updates on the status of the gas leak.

"We have to hound them to get any sort of information or to even speak to them," one of the roommates said.

"They've been very consistently unrealistic and unhelpful in terms of making a clear timeline and giving us adult expectations," the second roommate explained. "It's like they're just kind of doing what they can to stay afloat and tend to give messy explanations. There's a lot of blaming Con Ed."

Camilleri declined to comment.

Since June 22, building management has slipped notices under each apartment door to update tenants about the gas situation, but fewer were sent out as time went on, the residents said.

Camilleri sent the first notice out to tell residents the company would compensate each unit \$50 a month for the lack of gas.

The company also bought its tenants hot plates to cook on in the meantime, the residents said.

On July 7, the building's water was shut off for plumbing work and a week later Con Ed was on the scene to install new electrical meters, according to Camilleri's notices.

Then in August, residents received a letter notifying them that plumbers were testing and repairing the gas lines.

But the gas remains shuttered, and in a Jan. 21 notice, Camilleri said the building was still in the process of dealing with Con Ed.

"It has been extremely difficult to deal with Con Ed, we have given them the required inspection signoffs, plans and permits and any additional items that they request only to have them request additional items," Camilleri wrote. "I believe now they have all that they need to move forward with the gas restoration."

The building management's efforts to make peace by taking \$50 off rent isn't enough, considering what residents have been through, they said.

"The \$50 don't compare to what I spend buying food," Baines said. "I have to plug in the hot plate to an outlet that sparks when I push it in too much. It's dangerous and I get angry that I can't cook. I can't take it no more."

*In a previous version of the story, Mautner-Glick was identified as the owner of the building. Mautner-Glick is the building's managing company.*

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## Illegal Gas Hookups in Uptown Buildings Were 'Time Bomb,' Councilman Says

By Lindsay Armstrong ([//www.dnainfo.com/new-york/about-us/our-team/editorial-team/lindsay-armstrong](http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/about-us/our-team/editorial-team/lindsay-armstrong)) | May 15, 2015 6:24pm | Updated on May 18, 2015 8:56am  
[@lindsay\\_anne81](https://twitter.com/lindsay_anne81) ([http://twitter.com/lindsay\\_anne81](http://twitter.com/lindsay_anne81))



View Full Caption

DNAINFO/Lindsay Armstrong

WASHINGTON HEIGHTS — A handful of Uptown buildings with illegal gas hookups run by a single management company were "time bomb[s]," according to a city councilman.

City Councilman Mark Levine (<http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/people/mark-levine>) gathered with tenants in front of 600 W. 161st St., one of the affected buildings, on Friday morning to demand action from Alma Realty (<http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/tags/alma-realty>), which was recently found by Con Edison to have eight buildings with illegal gas hookups in Upper Manhattan and The Bronx.

"[We] demand action in the face of irresponsible and dangerous behavior by Alma Realty, who installed in this building an illegal hookup that was stealing gas and, more importantly, was a time bomb," Levine said.

The discovery came a little more than a month after two people were killed when an East Village building exploded due to what investigators believe was an illegal gas hookup. (<http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20150327/east-village/heres-what-investigators-think-might-have-caused-east-village-blast>)



Lindsay Armstrong · DNAINfo Reporter

Would higher standards for plumbers help reduce the number of illegal gas hookups