



UPDATED (July 27, 2018)
Steam Main Explosive Event: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What happened?

A Con Edison steam main exploded at about 6:50 a.m. on July 19, 2018, around Fifth Avenue and 20th Street in Manhattan. Concrete, asphalt, mud and asbestos-containing material were released from the explosion. More than 40 buildings were affected and evacuated.

What is the city doing to respond to this incident?

- Con Edison and the New York City Department of Environmental Protection are monitoring the air and collecting debris samples.
- Con Edison and the Fire Department are cleaning building facades.
- The New York City Health Department and the Department of Environmental Protection will continue to evaluate test results and potential health risks. City inspectors are inspecting the common areas and roofs of affected buildings.

What are the results of the air and debris sampling?

To date, the air samples analyzed have been negative for asbestos. Some debris samples contained asbestos.

How was the sampling conducted?

Debris samples were initially collected at the site of the steam main rupture and tested for asbestos. Some of these first samples were positive for asbestos. The sampling area was expanded, with ongoing testing of the debris samples collected. When the samples collected no longer contained asbestos, a perimeter for the affected area was established.

Air samples are collected by drawing air through filters. The filters are then examined for the presence of asbestos fibers. To date, the air samples analyzed have been negative for asbestos. Air monitoring is ongoing.

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a natural mineral fiber that was commonly used as steam main insulation. Asbestos poses little or no risk of exposure when left in place. When disturbed, it can get into the air and people can breathe it in.

What are the health risks from this incident?

People with asthma and other respiratory conditions can experience breathing difficulties from exposure to the initial plume of debris and steam. Exposure to this plume may also cause eye, nose and throat irritation. If you are experiencing any symptoms, contact your doctor.

While the debris contained asbestos, it is very unlikely that one-time exposure will cause an asbestos-related illness. Such illnesses, including lung cancer, typically develop after many years of exposure to asbestos.

Can a medical test show if I have been exposed to asbestos?

There is no routine medical test to detect exposure to asbestos. As mentioned above, short-term exposure – such as in an incident like this – is very unlikely to lead to asbestos-related illness. Illness generally occurs after many years of exposure to asbestos. Asbestos-related illness, once it occurs, can be detected by medical tests, e.g., chest x-rays and lung function tests.

What should I do if I was exposed to debris or mud from this incident?

If debris from the steam main explosion got on your clothing, seal all clothing and other affected items, such as backpacks, into clear plastic bags. Con Edison is collecting bagged clothing at 19th Street and Broadway.

What if my prescription drugs are in my apartment and I don't have access to them?

If you cannot access your prescription drugs, call your doctor and obtain a new prescription.

Where can I get help?

The City has established a reception center at The Clinton School at 10 E. 15th Street in Manhattan. Representatives from the Health Department, the Department of Environmental Protection and Con Edison are there from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. to answer questions and provide guidance. Mental health services are also available.

What if fears about this incident seriously affect my family and work life?

It is not unusual for traumatic events to leave people frightened, confused and insecure. Stress-related symptoms, such as feeling angry, having headaches or being suspicious and hyper-alert may occur after an event. You can find help by calling 1-888-NYC-WELL (1-888-692-9355). NYC WELL is available 24/7, with trained staff ready to take your calls and offer advice:

English: 1-888-692-9355, press 2

Español: 1-888-692-9355, press 3

中文: 1-888-692-9355, press 4

Call 711 (Relay Service for Deaf/Hard of Hearing)

Re-Occupying Your Home or Business

What steps must happen before an affected building can be reopened?

City agencies, Con Edison and building owners must work together to complete these steps:

- Cleaning the outside of the building
- Re-inspecting the outside of the building after cleaning
- Inspecting the roof and common areas for debris
- Removing any debris from the roof and common areas of the building
- Replacing HVAC filters if the building has a central HVAC system

- Assessing and analyzing indoor air quality

Building owners will receive a letter from the Health Department and the Department of Environmental Protection when their building is ready for re-occupancy.

What if there is debris inside my workplace or home?

If you see debris in your home or workplace, you should visit the reception center at 10 E. 15th Street where representatives from Con Edison, the Health Department and the Department of Environmental Protection are on-site from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Or you can call 212-358-4565. **Do not disturb, sweep or vacuum the debris.**

Can parts of my building be re-occupied while other parts remain closed?

Yes, it is possible that some parts of a building will be cleared for re-entry while other parts will remain closed because of ongoing clean-up. Closed areas must remain off-limits to the public. If the clean-up involves asbestos removal, the area must be properly contained and warning signs must be posted.

Check nyc.gov for further updates.