



The City of New York
Department of Investigation

MARK G. PETERS
COMMISSIONER

80 MAIDEN LANE
NEW YORK, NY 10038
212-825-5900

Release #05-2016
nyc.gov/html/doi

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2016

CONTACT: DIANE STRUZZI
NICOLE TURSO
(212) 825-5931

Remarks of DOI Commissioner Mark G. Peters
Press Conference in Connection with 2015 Fatal Gas Explosion on Second Avenue
Held at the Manhattan District Attorney's Office

I want to thank District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr. and his dedicated prosecutors. They have been one of our most important partners in fighting corruption in New York City.

Let me also thank Police Commissioner William Bratton, Fire Commissioner Daniel Nigro, and each of the police officers, detectives, and fire marshals who worked tirelessly on this case alongside the DOI team of nearly two dozen investigators, including DOI Chief Investigator James McElligott, Special Investigator Dan Taylor, Inspector General Gregory Cho and Associate Commissioner Jay Flaherty.

The partnership between these agencies – these investigators – is an important one.

As DOI does in all construction-related fatalities, we were at the site of this explosion on day one, investigating not only the criminal conduct but, concurrently, determining whether construction professionals were doing business within the parameters of their licenses and the law, and with due regard for public safety. Thus, we worked both with the District Attorney to prosecute criminal conduct and with regulators to pull licenses and stop reckless construction professionals from future dangerous jobs.

The misconduct that led up to the explosion – the fake documents and dishonest practices – show that corrupting the process has real, life-threatening consequences. For example, one of the defendants we arrested today is Licensed Master Plumber Andrew Trombettas. DOI investigators worked the criminal case and also audited Trombettas' jobs that were unrelated to the fatal investigation. This two-pronged effort found serious problems with Trombettas' conduct. We learned that Trombettas provided false information to the City on many jobs and endangered public safety on numerous occasions.

Being a Licensed Master Plumber is a big deal – it means you have extensive experience in the trade and have been vetted closely. It means we trust you to do work with things like gas lines that carry real public safety risks. It means you are responsible for the jobs you put your seal on and file with the City.

Trombettas violated that trust and that responsibility: He farmed out his license for a quick buck, filing fake paperwork that gave the appearance he was working at this site. But his travel and mobile phone records tell a different story. On one occasion Trombettas was in Greece and on a second occasion he was in Queens.

In reality, Trombettas was nowhere near the site, signing off that the work was done without ever seeing it, according to the charges. A Licensed Master Plumber with integrity would never have let this work go forward.

This investigation led to Trombettas being charged for his conduct and his license getting revoked. He cannot file permits with the City of New York. This is good news for New Yorkers.

The conduct of a second defendant, Dilber Kukic, also shows the real dangers posed by corruption. Here, showing up at the scene that day, DOI investigators saw a truck with the name Neighborhood Construction inscribed

more

on it and connected it to Kukic who DOI had previously arrested for paying off an inspector rather than following the rules just a month earlier. Kukic's earlier arrest was part of a widespread bribery investigation that led to the indictment of 50 individuals – City inspectors and City businessmen. Ultimately, Kukic was convicted of paying \$600 during a DOI undercover operation to avoid correcting serious violations at his properties located on West 173rd St. in Manhattan.

When we saw that Kukic was involved in the explosion as well, our antenna went up. And when we began looking at Kukic in relation to the explosion, we discovered his penchant for defying the rules had not changed. He was the General Contractor who was at the scene shortly before the explosion. He was the person who was supposed to be responsible for hiring a legitimate Master Plumber who would properly oversee the installation of the gas hook-up, which the facts of this investigation show never happened. Indeed, witnesses have called Kukic's honesty on this project into question as well.

Today's arrests of Kukic and Trombetta demonstrate the paramount fact that DOI has found through its investigations of construction-related fatalities:

- Integrity and safety are indelibly linked.
- Filing a false document, putting your license out for sale, paying bribes to City inspectors, disregarding public safety, may be faster and cheaper than following the rules.
- But cutting corners has its cost. It steadily erodes the integrity of an entire job. It puts the safety of New Yorkers and workers in the construction industry at risk.
- It takes lives.

This fatal explosion that killed two people and injured more than a dozen demonstrates starkly what happens when construction professionals ignore the regulations that protect this City.

At any time, any one of these defendants could have reported to the authorities that there was something amiss.

No one came forward.

No one stood up for safety.

Not one of these construction professionals did his job.

The message from this investigation is clear: When you turn your back on your license, when you intentionally defy the regulations, you break the law.

Break the law and we will find you and hold you accountable – for the victims and for the safety of all New Yorkers.

Thank you.

Indictments are accusations. Defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

DOI is one of the oldest law-enforcement agencies in the country and New York City's corruption watchdog. Investigations may involve any agency, officer, elected official or employee of the City, as well as those who do business with or receive benefits from the City. DOI's strategy attacks corruption comprehensively through systemic investigations that lead to high-impact arrests, preventive internal controls and operational reforms that improve the way the City runs.

**DOI's press releases can also be found at twitter.com/doinews
See Something Crooked in NYC? Report Corruption at 212-3-NYC-DOI.**