

# Judge orders Atmos to preserve evidence from explosion

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negligent marking of its pipeline in the wrong location, combined with its conscious decision to operate its natural gas distribution system with known leaks — which are, disturbingly, a source of profit to the company — caused this horrific but easily preventable tragedy,” Dallas-based attorney Chris Hamilton wrote in the filing on behalf of Eric Peters, who survived the explosion and is seeking \$1 billion in damages.

Investigators have yet to declare what went wrong in Oak Cliff, but the filing alleges and records obtained by *The Dallas Morning News* show Atmos had repeatedly been notified of gas leaks on the block for more than a year before the explosion. Further, the pipe material cited as faulty in the filing has been the subject of state investigations for decades.

A technical diagram obtained by *The News* also shows a gas line in the spot where drilling occurred in front of The Clyde, and a photograph in the filing appears to show that the spot was not marked as having an underground gas line.

The National Transportation Safety Board, the agency leading the investigation into the explosion, is expected to release a preliminary report soon. The agency’s full investigation of the root cause could take more than a year.

## Old pipes

The pipe present at The Clyde, the filing alleges, was an early-form of polyethylene gas pipe. Such pipes have long been linked to leaks, explosions and fires, according to a 2004 report from the Railroad Commission of Texas.

Utilities launched several efforts to locate and replace the pipe over the years, efforts regulators found were delayed and incomplete. A fatal explosion in Garland prompted increased oversight in the late 1990s, when state investigators concluded companies knew — or should have



Debris from a deadly explosion and fire at The Clyde apartment building can be seen behind a fence in Oak Cliff on June 3 in Dallas. Three people were killed in the May 28 explosion and fire at the apartment building.

known — about the risks for decades and should have removed it much sooner.

Atmos had numerous opportunities to discover the outdated and leak-prone pipe was present at and near The Clyde, the filing alleges, including replacing the meter at the property two weeks before the explosion.

The gas company repeatedly sent crews to various locations on the 400 block of East 9th Street for gas line repairs. The first ticket cited in the filing came on January 27, 2025: “Emergency-gas repair, ‘Gas is blowing.’ At least three other repair tickets followed that year.

At The Clyde itself, *The News* found, an excavator submitted an emergency 811 ticket on behalf of Atmos on March 20, 2026. Contacting Texas811 triggers notification of phone, electric, cable, gas and other utilities to send out locators to mark lines so digging can occur safely.

“Crew en route, Customers

with service, Gas is leaking,” the March ticket stated.

Atmos didn’t submit a response to 811 indicating whether it had gone out to mark lines.

Over the next two months, the excavator renewed the 811 ticket on Atmos’ behalf every 10 to 12 days. The 811 ticket renewed on May 15 was still in effect the day of the explosion.

If gas was already accumulating underground, that could have caused the explosion on its own, said Robert Hall, a former investigator with the NTSB who now works for the NTSB nonprofit Pipeline Safety Trust, an organization that advocates for industry and regulatory reforms. Hall is not involved in the lawsuit.

Hall led the investigation into the 2018 house explosion in West Dallas that killed 12-year-old Linda Rogers while she was getting ready for school. That investigation found a gas pipe began leaking after being damaged more than 20 years earlier, causing gas to accumulate under-

ground. Monday’s filing alleges persistent leaks at The Clyde would have caused natural gas to build up beneath the building.

It’s also possible, Hall said, that the drilling damage to the 811 ticket on Atmos’ behalf added enough gas to what was already leaking. Or, the drilling damage alone could have been the cause.

## Before the explosion

At The Clyde, tragedy unfolded in the days after ECS Limited, the engineering consulting firm that was assessing the soil for future construction, contacted 811. A developer set to buy the property and build new housing there had hired ECS for the soil analysis.

ECS provided four geographic coordinates for drilling, 811 records show. Spots for drilling, experts told *The News*, are typically chosen based on the future building plans.

The lines were reported to

811 as located, records show.

The locator would likely have begun the job behind The Clyde, industry experts told *The News*. Google street views captured in the rear alley before the building was destroyed show the gas meter at the back of the building, on the northwest corner.

Line locators responding to an 811 ticket typically mark lines between the neighborhood’s distribution line and the meter for the property.

The filing alleges faulty line location resulted in a contractor drilling in a location that had not been marked.

Photos included in the suit, identified as taken by the driller, show no marks locating the gas line at the drilling spot.

It’s unclear why the locator allegedly didn’t mark the location of the gas line the driller struck.

More than a decade ago, however, an engineering firm was able to find it, according to a diagram of underground utilities *The News* obtained from

the city’s water department. The firm created the diagram in advance of water and sewer line work underneath 9th Street in front of the building, and included gas line locations.

The *News* overlaid the diagram on an overhead Google Maps image of The Clyde. The line that branches toward the Clyde points directly to one of the spots ECS Limited had indicated it wanted to drill — the same spot where ECS reported that the excavator, Barba Drilling, hit the line.

“There is a clear mark that there is a gas line there,” said Sahadat Hossain, a professor of civil engineering at the University of Texas Arlington who reviewed the diagram. “They should not have drilled there, simple.”

It’s unclear whether ECS, the line locator or Barba Drilling knew of the city map. Barba and ECS did not respond to requests for comment.

## More leaks

After the explosion Atmos again reported emergency gas leak repairs on blocks close to The Clyde.

Atmos’ website also indicates it now has a project in progress on the same street as The Clyde, to install natural gas facilities. The filing alleges the work is Atmos’ “scrambling” to replace other old pipes in the area.

On Monday, the lot where The Clyde once stood remained fenced off. Workers in reflective vests moved between parked vehicles along East Ninth Street. A security guard sat in a nearby sedan.

Yellow Atmos Energy utility flags tracing the buried gas line in front of the complex stretched much of the block. Recently poured sections of sidewalk at either end sat beside yellow gas utility lids that appeared newly installed.

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# Study examines the religious makeup of North Texas

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## Demographic breakdown

The majority of adults in D-FW identify as Christian, and evangelical protestants make up the largest Christian demographic. The 2023-24 survey found 6% of adults identify with the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest protestant denomination in the U.S. Nine percent of adults identify as non-denominational under the evangelical protestant umbrella.

Pew Research categorizes D-FW by the federal Office of Management and Budget’s definition. That includes several North Texas counties and the cities of Dallas, Fort Worth, Arlington, Plano, Irving, Denton, Richardson and Grapevine.

In 2023-24, historically Black protestant adults made up about 7% of D-FW adults and 5% of adults in Texas. Catholics made up about 14% of adults in D-FW but 20% of adults in Texas, the survey said. Mainline protestant adults made up about 11% of the population in D-FW, about the same as the rest of the state.

The share of Hindu adults has seen significant growth in D-FW. Over about 10 years, the survey said, the percentage of adults in D-FW who identify as Hindu grew from less than one percent to 3 percent.

Pankaj Kumar, a member of Hindus of D-FW, said technology jobs, affordable housing and the agreeable climate of North Texas have fueled immigration to the region. The num-

ber of temples in North Texas has tripled, Kumar said, and cultural celebrations have grown and community groups have multiplied.

“I have witnessed how Hindu Americans have flourished in the Metroplex with this growth,” he said.

Notably, almost one-third of adults in D-FW are not religiously affiliated. Robert Hunt, a professor of Christian mission and interreligious relations at the Perkins School of Theology at SMU, said religious affiliation is dropping among Generation Z in particular.

“It’s not that we’re going to feel we’re in a less religious or more secular society, but we’re going to feel more strongly that we’re in a religiously diverse society,” he said.

That feeling is already having an impact on how North Texas residents think about themselves, Hunt said.

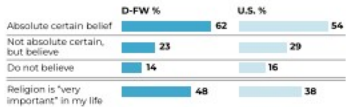
Debates on South Asian immigration, Hindus and Muslims — and even outright opposition — became prominent in the Frisco mayoral race.

At the same time, religious affiliation is also dropping among young people across all religions, Hunt said. While prominent churches across North Texas and the U.S. report growth in membership, Hunt said the growth does not reverse the overall trend.

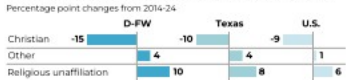
## Christian decline

Pew Research last conducted its national Religious Landscape Study in 2014. According to the survey that chronicled the makeup of D-FW in 2023-

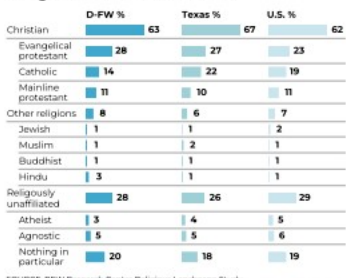
## Belief in God or a universal spirit



## Shift in religious identity among adults



## Religious affiliation in D-FW



SOURCE: PEW Research Center Religious Landscape Study. Laurie Joseph/Staff Artist

24, the share of adults who identify as Christian dropped by 15 percentage points.

In 2007, Pew found that 84% of adults identified as Christian in all of Texas compared to 67% in 2023-24. For adults who do not identify as being religious, D-FW outpaced the rest of the U.S. according to the survey. The

number of adults identifying as non-religious grew 10 percentage points from the 2014 survey.

“If you look back over the last several decades, there is clear evidence that we’ve been in a period of religious decline in the United States,” Smith, the Pew researcher, said.

However, Smith said the de-

cline of Christian Americans and the growth of adults identifying as non-religious appears to have plateaued over the past five or six years. Dallas-Fort Worth’s religious makeup has been consistent with these national trends, Smith said.

Historically, Smith said, young adults in the United States have been less religious than older adults. According to Smith, this is still true today, and a driving force of the long-term religious decline.

“We don’t see a lot of evidence to suggest that it has changed, certainly not in the national data, but it’s something we’ll be keeping an eye on,” Smith said.

This doesn’t mean young people are not attending services in some particular congregations or cities, but nationally, there isn’t much evidence of an increase in religious participation among young adults, Smith said.

Nic Burleson is the D-FW church planting strategist for Texas Baptists, the state’s largest Baptist denomination. He helps start new congregations with resources, coaching and planning.

Burleson said Texas Baptists helped start around 40 to 50 churches in the region last year, particularly in northern Dallas suburbs, north and west Fort Worth suburbs, Kaufman County and other areas that have seen explosive population growth in recent years.

And young people are getting involved, Burleson said the churches seeing significant growth are the ones reaching Generation Z.

“It’ll be interesting to see what the next wave of surveys say: Has the tide turned and now it is growing or has it just leveled off?” he said. “But there are definitely some positive things happening specifically with Gen Z.”

## Religious values

Even as more adults said they were not religious, the majority of adults in D-FW believe in God or a universal spirit, the survey said.

While 54% of U.S. adults reported an absolutely certain belief in God or a universal spirit, 62% of D-FW adults reported an absolutely certain belief. And while only 38% of adults in the U.S. say religion is “very important” in their lives, 48% of D-FW adults reported the same.

At the same time, only about a third of D-FW adults attend religious services weekly, the survey said.

Smith attributed that discrepancy to how people integrate religion into their daily lives in a variety of ways — not just attending a house of worship.

“What you’re seeing there is the complexity of religious belief and practice and identity,” Smith said. “There are lots of people who identify with a religion, they describe themselves as Christian or Jewish or Muslim or another faith, but in practice they don’t actually do very many religious things.”

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