CON EDISON SETTLES FOR $10.6 MILLION

NEW YORK — Con Edison reached a settlement with the state Public Services Commission on Wednesday over the death of a woman electrocuted while walking her dogs, agreeing to spend $10.6 million on stray-voltage detectors and other safety programs.
CON ED DEATH PAYOUT
$1M Jodie fund

By TODD VENEZIA

Con Ed has agreed to keep a closer eye on its electrical system and to start a $1 million college fund as part of a settlement with the family of a woman electrocuted while walking her dog.

Relatives of Jodie Lane — who died on Jan. 16 when she stepped on an electrified service-box cover — will also get an undisclosed cash payout.

"We are gratified that something positive is resulting from Jodie’s unfortunate and untimely death," said Stanley Witkow, a spokesman for the family.

As part of the settlement, Con Ed has agreed to a series of reforms, including regular inspections of manholes, which will routinely be checked for stray current.

The settlement will also call for research on ways to keep electricity from charging equipment like the service box that killed Lane in the East Village.

An investigation by the utility found the box was electrified because a worker had improperly wrapped an exposed wire in the box a year before the tragedy.

A safety foundation started in Lane’s name with money from the family’s settlement will have a right to appoint experts to review Con Ed compliance with the agreement.

"It’s the first time Con Ed has entered into an agreement with a private entity in regards to the way they conduct their business," Witkow said.

Con Ed has agreed to meet with their experts twice a year.

The $1 million educational donation will support a scholarship as well as fund research at Columbia University Teachers College, where Lane had been pursuing her doctoral degree.

"The establishment of the fund at Columbia will be an enduring legacy to Jodie’s memory," Witkow said.

He added the new Jodie S. Lane Public Safety Foundation is being made possible because of money from the settlement.

"It’s in the nature of a platform, for [the family] to do good works," he said.

Con Ed CEO Eugene McGrath released a statement saying: "The men and women of Con Edison deeply regret the tragic death of Jodie S. Lane.

"This settlement allows us to demonstrate our continuing commitment to making New York a better place."

The company said it had already been enacting many of the reforms that it agreed to as part of the settlement.
Con Ed settled 11 shocking suits before E. Village death

By KENNETH LOVETT
Post Correspondent

ALBANY — Even before a woman died in January after stepping on an electrified manhole cover in Manhattan, Con Edison had already settled 11 cases of electric shock in the past four years.

All told, the company received 19 claims of accidental shock from January 2000, including 17 in Manhattan, one in Staten Island and one in Queens. Con Ed President Kevin Burke wrote in a letter to Assemblyman Ryan Karben (D-Rockland).

Eleven of the cases have been settled, five are pending, one was dismissed, and one was not pursued, Burke wrote.

Con Ed officials wouldn’t say how much the settlements totaled.

“The number of these cases is shocking,” Karben said.

The Democrat said he is drafting legislation that would prohibit settlements from factoring into any future Con Ed rate hikes.

Currently, only litigation which finds “gross negligence” is excluded from the rate hike process. Con Ed officials wouldn’t comment on the plan.

“Con Ed has pledged to have an aggressive annual inspection program,” said company spokesman Chris Cieri.

“We’ve inspected all 29,000 manhole and service-box covers and immediately fixed those with stray voltage.”

Jodi Lane was walking her two dogs in the East Village in January when she died stepping on an electrified manhole cover.

In subsequent inspections of the manhole and service box covers, Con Ed found 176 with stray voltage, some at alarmingly high levels.

IN 4/30/04 N.Y. POST

FYI
Bill targets Con Edison

Con Ed would have to conduct detailed checks of manhole covers and service boxes at least once every three years under a bill passed by the state Assembly yesterday.

The bill would also require annual stray-voltage and "visual" checks of electric utility equipment. Equipment in rural areas would have to be checked less often.

A similar bill is pending in the state Senate.

The bill is aimed at making sure Con Ed regularly checks its equipment, said Assemblywoman Deborah Glick (D-Manhattan).

"The continued episodes of electric shocks to neighborhood pets serves as a warning that their procedures are seriously flawed," Glick said.

Con Ed, without explaining, said in a statement that the bill "could lead to unsafe conditions, cause power outages and weaken service reliability for our customers."

The bill was passed in response to the death of Jodie Lane, 30, who was electrocuted Jan. 16 when she stepped on a Con Ed service box in the East Village.

Bill Sonderson
Times Sq. shocked
4 jolted by box voltage

By DAN KADISON and STEFANIE COHEN

A teenage model and her sister, in town for Fashion Week, were among four people who suffered electric shocks when they stepped on a snow-covered service box yesterday in Times Square yesterday.

Hannah Davis, 15, from the Virgin Islands, and her sister, Rachel, 23, a New Jersey teacher, were taken to St. Vincent's Midtown Hospital after they suddenly crumpled to the ground. They were released after treatment.

The other two, whose names were not immediately released, declined medical attention.

"It was like a stun gun," said Hannah, who had completed a magazine shoot the day before.

Rachel managed to crawl off the box, but Hannah, who fell on her back, said she felt paralyzed by the charge.

Their mother, Debi, dragged her to safety. "I thought they'd slipped," said Debi, 52.

"I thought they were being silly.

The family was headed to a movie when the girls decided to buy themselves rubber boots. They were crossing the street in the middle of the block when the sisters suddenly felt pins and needles in their legs.

"Do you feel that?" Hannah asked Rachel. "This is crazy," Debi said. "I could have lost two girls!"

Chris Oertt said he did not know what caused the insulation to fail. "We are in the process of fixing it," he said. Earlier this month, officials released a report showing that stray electrical voltage had been found at 1,100 sites in the city last year.

Con Ed has been spurred to test all poles publicly accessible sources of electric after the January electrocution of Lane in the East Village.
A skateboarder says she's scarred for life after falling on a red hot manhole cover in Manhattan, just blocks from where a woman was fatally electrocuted earlier this year.

Liz Wallenberg, 26, says she fell while skating at 13th Street and Second Avenue on Saturday. She landed on a manhole cover that was piping hot.

But it wasn't until she walked up the block and met her friends at a nightclub that she realized how badly she was burned, with an imprint of the manhole cover on her lower back.

"I didn't really fall that hard on my back, so it was weird to me that it was hurting," she said. "So I got up
really quickly, and I was like 'Ow,' because it just felt weird, like a stinging. And then I noticed that I was completely branded."

Wallenberg went to Beth Israel Medical Center, where doctors gave her painkillers and a special ointment and told her she'll be at least partially scarred for life.

"It's really uncomfortable, and it hurts," she said. "I can't sit. I have to sit all day at my job, and it hurts to sit. I can't lay in my bed right."

Just a few blocks away, in January, East Village resident Jodie Lane was killed when she tried to rescue her dogs from an electrified metal cover on East 11th Street. Melting snow had corroded the insulation of some wires.

A subsequent inspection found more than 400 locations with stray voltage, all of which were fixed, according to Con Ed. The utility also changed its policy to require annual voltage checks of its 250,000 manholes and service boxes around the city.

"Obviously, they missed a few things and need to check on these things regularly to make sure nobody else will get hurt," Wallenberg said.

A Con Ed spokesperson says that the manhole that burned Wallenberg has been fixed but that the cause is still under investigation.

Wallenberg says she is considering legal action. "I have tattoos, and it's something that I wanted, and that's fine," she said. "But you know, I didn't want Con Edison branded onto my back."