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Statement by Chief Anhalt Concerning the Explosion Investigation Disposition

On July 10th, downtown Sun Prairie experienced a gas leak and subsequent explosion that resulted in the loss of life, varying degrees of injuries, and considerable public and private property damage.

That evening, the Sun Prairie Police Department and the State Fire Marshal's Office initiated an investigation. During the last 23 weeks, investigators have collected and studied at least 45 pieces of evidence, reviewed over 400 pages of documents, conducted 67 interviews, and consulted closely with the Dane County District Attorney's Office and the Wisconsin Attorney General's Office. My purpose today is to provide our community with an update.

The investigation revealed the following:

Verizon Wireless contracted with Bear Communications for a fiber optic installation project that included underground work at the intersection of Main St. and Bristol St. Bear Communications first subcontracted with Jet Underground to accomplish the actual construction. Prior to Jet Underground performing the work, Bear Communications changed subcontractors to VC Tech.

VC Tech proceeded with the fiber installation project and, while engaged in underground directional boring, cut through a WE Energies gas line. Approximately 40 minutes later, the escaping gas found an unidentified ignition source causing an explosion and several fires.

We have determined that the intersection, including the specific location where the gas line was struck, was not completely marked. This error appears to be the result of miscommunication between USIC, Bear Communications, Jet Underground, and VC Tech. Prior to the explosion, conversations occurred between representatives of each of these companies, both on and off site, during which incomplete and inaccurate information was exchanged and relied upon.

Law enforcement investigators and criminal prosecutors do not determine fault. They determine if there is probable cause to believe that a crime was committed. After careful review and consideration, the Sun Prairie Police Department, the State Fire Marshal's Office, the Dane County District Attorney's Office, and the Wisconsin Attorney General's Office have jointly reached the conclusion that there is not probable cause to believe a crime was committed. As a result, the investigation is now classified as inactive.

An inactive classification allows us to make additional information available to the community. In order to facilitate access to this information, the redacted case reports and video will be posted to the city's website following this briefing. Because detailed information is being made immediately available, we will forgo taking questions at this time.

Moving forward, it is our sincere hope that this tragedy will result in a serious evaluation of regulatory language pertaining to the responsibilities of those engaged in utility work. Representative Hebl has pledged his assistance in pursuing improvements to Wisconsin statutes. Advancements to public safety are available, and I can think of no better way to honor the service and sacrifice of Captain Barr.

As I have in the past, I would like to express my deep appreciation for the courageous efforts of our firefighters, paramedics, and police officers to assist those in harm's way both before and after the explosion. We will never know how many lives were saved, but we do know that about 250 people were evacuated from the immediate area prior to the explosion.

Also, I would like to extend my gratitude to my fellow community members for the overwhelming care and concern you extended to the Barr family, the injured, the displaced, the devastated, and the first responders. We will not forget your kindness and support.

Thank you.