

The same question must also be raised with the owners of the two other trans-Island pipelines, Brooklyn Union Gas and Transcontinental. Both have excellent safety records, but that doesn't guarantee future disasters won't happen.

What precautions have these two companies taken against a massive leak like the one in Willowbrook? How would those companies deal with such a situation? And what steps will the Buckeye company take to ensure that a leak like the one in Willowbrook never happens again? After two massive gas spills in six years (the last, a 42,000 spill caused by vandals, occurred in 1979), Staten Islanders are justifiably concerned.

Finally, there is the question of cost. So far, no dollar figure has been placed on the Willowbrook cleanup, but it surely runs into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. The city should not have to bear that huge expense by itself.

Someone is liable for that cleanup money, either Buckeye itself or the construction company that broke the pipeline. They must pay up. It is bad enough that hundreds of city workers were disrupted by this accident. The city should not have to lose money on the deal besides.

Still, the system worked, and it worked beautifully. Some people were inconvenienced, and one worker was injured, but that was all. In a few days, when the cleanup is finished and traffic returns to normal, it will be as if the accident never even happened.

We were lucky. It could have been far, far worse.