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Media Release for August 23, 2005

**KINGS COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY CHARLES J. HYNES  
ANNOUNCES MURDER INDICTMENT OF UNLICENSED PLUMBER**

*UNLICENSED PLUMBER'S NEGLIGENCE IN ILLEGAL BASEMENT  
CONVERSION CAUSES EXPLOSION RESULTING IN TENANT'S DEATH*

**LANDLORD ALSO CHARGED IN THE ILLEGAL CONVERSION**

**Brooklyn, August 23, 2005** – Kings County District Attorney Charles J. today announced the indictment of Bernard Barham, 46, in the killing of 42-year-old Julius Drecketts. Barham, a plumber, was hired by the owner of the building at 94 Harman Street in Bushwick, to convert a basement in that building into two new apartments, which is illegal. Barham is charged with Criminally Negligent Homicide and Illegal Conversion. He faces a maximum of 1 1/3 – 4 years in prison. The landlord, Mordechai Landau, is charged with Illegal Conversion. If convicted, he could be sentenced to up to a year in jail.

The Department of Investigation and the District Attorney's Office announced the indictment of both defendants. They indicated that this building in Bushwick had two floors with two apartments on each floor, though it was zoned only for a total of two apartments. Landau wanted to create two new illegal apartments in the basement. Barham was neither licensed nor insured.

When Barham went to work for Landau in the building on June 14, 2004, he had to move and cover up the pipes, and work on the gas lines. Barham claimed to have brought along another worker, who he identified only as "Sonny," to help him. They turned off the gas in the building and got started with the plumbing. According to the indictment, at the end of the workday, Barham put the gas back on and smelled gas. He then tried to light the hot water heater, but the pilot light did not go on. He then left the building without turning off the gas or trying to rectify the problem. Sonny has never been identified.

The next morning when the tenant in the rear first floor apartment, Julius Drecketts,

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turned on the stove, there was a massive explosion. The blast blew out the entire back wall of the building and badly damaged Drecketts' apartment and the other apartments located upstairs.

Drecketts suffered burns to 95% of his body. He was rushed to the Cornell Burn Unit in Manhattan where he died as a result of the burns on June 30<sup>th</sup>.

When fire marshals and police detectives went to the scene to investigate, they searched the basement and discovered a pipe "T" connection with an open end and nothing capping it. Two outlets were covered by piping, but the third was completely uncovered, causing a major gas leak. When confronted with this information, Barham blamed the incident on his helper, Sonny.

District Attorney Hynes said, "Let this prosecution send the message: as living space in Brooklyn is ever more at a premium, my Office will not tolerate dangerous and deadly practices by unscrupulous landlords looking to cut corners on safety in the name of greed."

DOI Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn said, "The defendants' negligence and selfish desire to cut costs had tragic consequences. Both defendants deliberately failed to adhere to safety codes and regulations, which were put in place to help prevent disasters like the one that killed Julius Drecketts."

The case is being prosecuted by Deputy Bureau Chief Mike Spanakos of the Rackets Division. Michael Vecchione is Chief of the Rackets Division. Detective Michael Stumpf of NYPD and Fire Marshals Ernest Medaglia and Lawrence Pliska of FDNY investigated this case.

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