

On August 16, 2016, I, Ashley Rife had arrived to work and began gathering witness statements and the investigation details for the Tahoe Queen fire, Risk Management Claim # [REDACTED]

I had first started speaking to the painters from Painting Contractors Inc. (PCI). Jose Luis Aranda and Geneva Esquivel were still on the scene. Geneva took the lead and began telling me about the situation that occurred that morning on the boat. Her statement of what occurred has been retained. I have additional verbal comments that are not mentioned in the report but I notated a (1) next to my question. First, I asked, "Where was the welder at that time." She said, "He was on the hurricane deck Portside." She said, "He and the other welder then grabbed a fire extinguisher and went down to the second deck." Geneva mentioned there were at least 4 explosions that she remembered hearing. I then asked her if she could draw a diagram of what she remembered. She also at that time confirmed that another employee from PCI was on the boat and that was Armando. She did not know his last name but mentioned her boss could give us that information. Then it was mentioned that Jose Luis Aranda was injured while getting off the boat. Jose had climbed over the railing and was supporting Geneva as she got down. During the incident he injured his back. He saw Paramedics and was going to drive to the hospital to get checked out by a Dr. [REDACTED] contact information is [REDACTED]

Shortly after, I saw one of the welders. I asked if he was ok. He had said yes. During that time the Fire Marshall was talking to the owner of Advanced Marine. Unfortunately, I was unable to gain any statements from the Advanced Marine Team as they would not cooperate and were told from their insurance carrier not to provide us anything and to speak to their attorney.

I then spoke to Margarita (Maggie) Garcia-Nook, Aramark GM about the painters and Advanced Marine. She informed me that when she had arrived she was checking in to ensure everyone was ok. At that time, she spoke to a welder. The welder's physical description was the "taller, skinner guy." She mentioned he did not look good. Maggie mentioned he said, "There was a lot of smoke. There were sparks. I tried to contain it with a fire extinguisher and inhaled a lot of smoke." Maggie's statement is in the file.

Shortly after, I met Brian Branscum who was with Stantec Consulting Inc. (His statement is attached.) He was very helpful. He did take numerous photos, which I was unable to gain and could be useful in the investigation. Additionally, two other witnesses from his team gave statements which were John Lilla (National EWP) and Brett Arenas. Contact information for Brian Branscum is on his statement.

Next I spoke to the Fire Marshal from Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District, Eric Guevin. He informed me that the report number he is filing is IR-1396. During our conversation with Maggie present, he mentioned that Advanced Marine was also not cooperating with him. Eric did mention during the conversation that one of the welders had told him that a spark had caused the fire. They grabbed a fire extinguisher and went to the second deck to try to put it out.

Later, I spoke to Jeff Davis, Lake Tahoe Cruises Engineer for the MS Dixie. He had mentioned he received a call that the boat was on fire and he hurried over to the dock. He has worked near the construction crew in the past and last week was assigned to support with painting. Jeff's statement has been retained. After, reading his statement, I did ask him about who had told him what happened that morning. Jeff said, "A welder." He did not know his name but the physical description that was given was "The welder with short facial hair, not the huge beard. He is shorter in height."

I then updated Brendan McCabe from Aramark Global Risk Management. During that conversation, I gained contacts for the support team who would be arriving on scene.

I spoke to Darryl Dennis and Joao Rodrigues over a quick lunch meeting. At that time, Darryl had mentioned they (Advanced Marine) did not have a fire watch while welding. He mentioned we are invoiced for one and it is standard protocol for someone to be on fire watch. He also mentioned it should be on the daily breakout of the team and their duties. Darryl also mentioned they did not have a welding blanket under the location they were welding. This is a safety standard he mentioned is protocol for welding. At that time, I asked for Darryl's statement.

At approximately, 2:00pm a Marine Chemist was onboard the TQ to clear the vessel. Also, during this time, USCG, Aramark leaders, Advanced Marine and others had conducted a walk of the boat.

Later I connected with USCG Investigator [REDACTED] [REDACTED] who mentioned he was in charge of the Marine Investigation. I also met Greg and he gave direction that I relayed to our security team.

We needed to have 24/7 surveillance of the boat. We painted 3-4 markers to ensure the front or back of the boat did not take on water. Security would monitor from the top of the pier and go to the boat to inspect every 30-45 minutes. If any major activity the direction was to call Greg at [REDACTED]

During this conversation we were also informed we needed to submit a 2692 form within 5 days.

Later, I met Lieutenant [REDACTED] who mentioned for any Public Affairs Questions to contact him at [REDACTED]

Eric Guevin came back to the marina office to watch the video as we were trying to pull it off the Marina camera. During that time, we also got the direction for our overnight security to report any smoke or fire and to be very descriptive so the right amount of crew arrived on scene.

[REDACTED]

8/17/16

Ashley Rife