

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

MERRIMACK VALLEY RESIDENTIAL GAS *

FIRES AND EXPLOSIONS * Accident No.: PLD18MR003

SEPTEMBER 13, 2018 *

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Interview of: GRAHAM ROWE, Deputy Chief
North Andover Fire Department

Northern Essex Community College
Lawrence, Massachusetts

Monday,
September 17, 2018

APPEARANCES:

SHAWN CURRIE, Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. CURRIE: Good morning. It's September 17, 2018, and
3 we're in Lawrence, Massachusetts. This is in reference to NTSB
4 Case PLD18MR003, a gas leak and subsequent fires in Lawrence,
5 Andover, and North Andover, Massachusetts.

6 We are interviewing Deputy Chief Graham Rowe, R-O-W-E, of the
7 North Andover Fire Department. My name is Shawn Currie. I'm an
8 investigator with the National Transportation Board. And my name
9 is S-H-A-W-N, C-U-R-R-I-E. And with me is --

10 MS. GUNARATNAM: Rachael Gunaratnam, R-A-C-H-A-E-L,
11 G-U-N-A-R-A-T-N-A-M, hazmat investigator with the NTSB.

12 MS. MOTLEY: My name is Angela Motley. I am a member of the
13 Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities, public utilities
14 engineer.

15 MS. DOIRON: I'm Sheila Doiron -- S-H-E-I-L-A, Doiron,
16 D-O-I-R-O-N -- with Columbia Gas.

17 DET. LT. ZIPPER: Paul Zipper, Massachusetts State Police.
18 That's Z-I-P-P-E-R.

19 MS. HALLIDAY: Julie Halliday, Office of Pipeline Safety.
20 Julie, J-U-L-I-E, Halliday, H-A-L-L-I-D-A-Y.

INTERVIEW OF CHIEF DEPUTY GRAHAM ROWE

21
22 BY MR. CURRIE:

23 Q. Okay. Chief, thanks for coming and talking to us today. Can
24 you give me a little, like a snapshot of your training and your
25 background and experience as a fireman?

1 A. Sure. Got on in 2004, was promoted in 2012 to lieutenant.
2 Promoted in 2016 to deputy fire chief, been in that position ever
3 since. In theory, I am in charge of operations and training, but
4 it's now expanded to pretty much a little bit of everything in the
5 department.

6 As training in Massachusetts, Firefighter 1 and 2, Chief
7 Officer III, that's ProBoard. Hazmat operational level or
8 awareness level. A lot of command and control classes,
9 controlling Mayday. I spent a lot of time at the academy doing
10 classes because, as we all know, fires are down, especially in my
11 community, so that's why simulation through the academy. National
12 Fire Academy classes, plus working a lot of mutual aid in Lawrence
13 keeps us pretty busy.

14 Other trainings, almost done with my degree in fire science.
15 I was the assistant commander of the NEMLEC STARS unit, which is a
16 School Threat Assessment and Response System, overseeing large
17 incidents. I believe we had a -- at that time it was 52
18 communities, 600 schools that we oversaw for any threats, with a
19 team of 60 at that time.

20 Q. Okay. You were working the 13th?

21 A. Yes. Thursday, right? Yes.

22 Q. What was your shift that day?

23 A. My shift, I'm more of an administrative shift. So I start at
24 -- my office hours are from 9: to 4:30. I'm usually in the office
25 about 6 a.m. On this day I was actually going to leave a little

1 bit early. I was going to go visit my father in the hospital.

2 Q. Sorry to hear that. How many firemen do you have -- oh,
3 full-time fire department?

4 A. Yes, full-time.

5 Q. And how many guys and equipment?

6 A. We have 55 full-time members, 1 administrative, which would
7 be 56, but she's not a firefighter; she's just our secretary. We
8 have a full complement that we run on a daily basis: two engines,
9 a ladder truck, two ambulances.

10 Q. And what would be your manpower on that day?

11 A. Maximum 13, minimum 12.

12 Q. And how many did you have working that day?

13 A. Off the top of my head, I believe we had only 12 that day.

14 Q. Okay. And how many people live in North Andover?

15 A. How many people?

16 Q. Approximately.

17 A. About -- I think we broke the 30,000 mark not too long ago.

18 Q. Okay. So can you go through --

19 A. What happened?

20 Q. -- from the beginning to the end from what you remember.

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. And if you don't, if you don't know the exact address, that's
23 fine. Just --

24 A. No problem. Yeah.

25 Q. -- do the best you can.

1 A. I was at the new preschool that we just opened up. I was
2 with our fire prevention officer. We were doing an inspection.
3 They were testing whether or not when the fire alarm went off the
4 locks would unlock the doors so people could get in or out. We
5 were up there doing that.

6 It was about -- I think I met them up there about 3:45. So
7 we were starting to go through that. As we were clearing out from
8 there, a call came in for smoke in the basement. They dispatched
9 a box alarm, which would be two engines, the ladder, and an
10 ambulance in that district. So they started sending them out to
11 that. We decided we would sign on because of the smoke in the
12 basement. Both of us signed on, the fire prevention officer in
13 car 5 and myself in car 2, we signed on.

14 They gave us an update that a couple more gas calls came in,
15 so car 5 diverted to, I believe, Second Street to go look at a gas
16 -- gas or odor of gas on the second floor. He ended up going
17 there. I started my way down towards Sutton Street. That was the
18 first call that came in, smoke in the basement.

19 As I was en route there, we got a couple more calls coming
20 in. I believe -- I don't know if they were in this order, but
21 there was Herrick Road. There was Pleasant Street. I think there
22 were two on Pleasant Street. There was an Elmcrest. There were
23 quite a few that started popping up. Dispatch said that they had
24 numerous smoke in the basements or fires in the basement.

25 I ended up responding down to Sutton Street. By the time I

1 got there, the Engine 1 Company said that they believe it was a
2 boiler issue. They shut down the boiler and opened all the
3 windows. The residents said they would handle it at that point.

4 Another call came in for 34 East Water for the possibility of
5 a structure fire. Smoke in the basement, the homeowner believed
6 that his house was about to go up. So I left with -- Ambulance 1
7 and myself responded to that address. Engine 1 was clearing up,
8 they diverted, they came to us, but on their way they stopped at
9 Ashland Street because there was a structure fire at Ashland
10 Street, which was maybe 100 yards from where they were.

11 Our Engine 2 was en route down there, got diverted to another
12 call, I think it was Waverly Road call, and then they got diverted
13 to -- after they cleared that one, they got diverted to Main
14 Street for smoke in the basement with an elderly woman, disabled
15 woman trapped on the second floor. So they ended up going to
16 that.

17 I was on scene East Water where I set up my command post. My
18 ambulance crew made entry. They checked, they searched the house
19 to make sure that everyone was out, but since we had no water
20 supply, it was just a quick powerful primary search. They went
21 in; the place was clear.

22 I was calling for more engines, but at that point Lawrence
23 had already taken all of our mutual aid so we started reaching
24 out. I know they reached out to Essex County Regional, and just
25 started pulling trucks from anywhere available.

1 At one point I believe I saw Manchester, New Hampshire heavy
2 rescue coming through my town. We had a few chiefs from other
3 departments come over. I believe Middleton's fire chief came over
4 and he ran the fire on Green Street. I want to say the North
5 Reading chief or deputy chief came over and ran the fire on
6 Herrick Road.

7 I set up -- where I set up, I just tried to keep track on my
8 incident command board what trucks were where while trying to
9 watch my ambulance crew go in. Middleton showed up as our first
10 engine on my scene. They pretty much, I let them take over with
11 the ambulance. They ran a couple lines, put out the fire, and
12 that's when I started concentrating more on where trucks were
13 going, diverting. They were all asking where they wanted to go,
14 so I had my mobile command post there.

15 After we started to get things -- I wouldn't say under
16 control but a little bit more organized, I got word that the
17 police department wanted to meet over at the Saint Michael's
18 School. They needed -- wanted to set up a unified command there.

19 So that's -- while we had all these events going on, as soon
20 as I got a chance to clear up, we knocked down the fire on 34 East
21 Water Street, I responded over there to help set up. At that
22 point there were -- MEMA was there, the deputy fire marshal was on
23 her way; she was almost there. There were numerous state police,
24 North Andover Fire Emergency Management, and I believe, I think
25 the FBI showed up.

1 We started to set up who was coming in, where people were
2 going, and dispatch would coordinate with me that, oh, we have
3 these calls, what assets do you have available, and we'd start
4 shipping them out to other calls. A lot of the odor of gas calls,
5 we would send out just a pickup truck because that's all we really
6 had because everybody else was tied up with fires, and they would
7 just go and shut off the gas.

8 At that point we were there for maybe an hour, hour and a
9 half until we formed a game plan. We weren't sure if we were
10 going to stay there. It was starting to get dark, when I was
11 notified I was going to be relocated over here to the command
12 tower. I spoke with Lieutenant McGuire we was riding around in
13 one of our pickup trucks doing the gas calls, and I had him
14 respond to Saint Michael's to work with one of the police officers
15 and continue to run operations in North Andover.

16 And that's pretty much a real quick overview of what -- it
17 got pretty busy. Tracking the calls, it was a little difficult
18 not only just having to watch my ambulance group because they had
19 no line, I'm trying to write down as fast as I can what calls are
20 going where. And one of the biggest issues that I noticed that we
21 had was radio, radio communication, fighting for air time. That
22 was one of the toughest things, communication with a lot of the
23 other agencies.

24 I learned that there were communities in my town because --
25 they were just grabbing for communities anywhere because there

1 were no trucks available. I had no way to get ahold of Plaistow.
2 I don't even know what frequency they're on. I didn't -- I
3 couldn't get hold of Haverhill because I didn't have the
4 capability to get ahold of Haverhill. So it's a little unnerving
5 now knowing exactly who was in my community and -- dispatch pulled
6 back at least five dispatchers to try to control some of that
7 chaos.

8 Q. Okay. Thank you. Pretty thorough. I just have a few
9 follow-up questions --

10 A. Of course.

11 Q. -- if you don't mind. About what time did that Sutton
12 Street, the first smoke in basement call come in? Do you
13 remember?

14 A. In between 3:45 and 4 o'clock. Because my goal was to get
15 out by 4, leave about a half an hour early.

16 Q. So you said you started over there at 3:45?

17 A. I responded, yeah.

18 Q. From -- no, you were at the preschool at 3:45?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. That's when you first started to do anything. So were you
21 almost done or pretty close?

22 A. We were at -- they had tested maybe one door. All we did was
23 pull the alarm and the door opened up, so we were just talking.

24 Q. So would you say it was closer to 4 than 3:45?

25 A. Most likely, yeah.

1 Q. Okay. Your mutual aid plan, you said it was -- Lawrence had
2 exhausted that already.

3 A. Yeah. They, I believe -- it sounded like theirs got hit
4 first. And when that started happening, they started calling the
5 mutual aid plan, which Lawrence calls Andover, Lawrence calls us,
6 we call Andover, we call Lawrence. And when they started calling,
7 and the dispatchers called, they said Lawrence is getting hit just
8 as hard as we are, Andover's getting hit; we'll move out to the
9 next community. So they moved out to the next community, but
10 Lawrence had already gobbled them up. You know, I was asking for
11 Grove and I asked for Georgetown, any of the smaller communities
12 that people don't usually jump to, they were all taken.

13 So we started reaching to North Reading, who I believe isn't
14 even on our run card until like a 10th or 11th alarm, and they're
15 pretty far out because they're a different district. They came
16 over; they started. I know one of the deputy chiefs came over
17 there. I said call North Reading control, they'll be able to help
18 you. Essex Regional started reaching out to Lynnfield, which are
19 pretty far down on our run card.

20 Q. Okay. You mentioned a run card.

21 A. Um-hum.

22 Q. Can we get a copy of that?

23 A. Yeah. Of course.

24 Q. And then obviously since you have a run card that only goes
25 so deep, some of those resources didn't come.

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Did you have a staging area by chance?

3 A. We set it up at the middle school.

4 Q. Okay. And was there a staging area manager that kept track
5 of --

6 A. Lieutenant Hebert.

7 Q. And he kept track of who came in?

8 A. I had him respond up there to keep track of the trucks that
9 came in through there. And then when they would get sent out, he
10 would mark them off on the list.

11 Q. Okay. Can we get a copy of that list so -- because what I
12 maybe --

13 A. I don't have it. It was written on a dry erase board as he
14 was doing it. It wasn't -- he started on a piece of paper. One
15 of the chiefs said, here it's a lot easier to write it on this
16 because it was a bigger board. So he kept track of who was coming
17 in. It was just dropped off at my office yesterday nice and clean
18 because it belongs to another community.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. I can try to get a list from dispatch of who came in.

21 Q. That's what I'm going to ask. I would ask if you could get a
22 list of who came in and approximately how many pieces of apparatus
23 and bodies.

24 A. Excellent. Okay. Do you mind if I steal a piece of paper
25 from you just so I can write that down?

1 Q. No. I'll actually give you a list when we leave.

2 A. Excellent. All right. Perfect.

3 DET. LT. ZIPPER: I'm just thinking maybe he took, someone
4 took a photo of that run board.

5 MR. ROWE: Actually -- wait. Yeah, you're right. That's if
6 he's still in here.

7 BY MR. CURRIE:

8 Q. So they set up a unified command at Saint Michael's School?

9 A. Yes. We met to organize, figure out where we were going,
10 what --

11 Q. Obviously in the heat of the battle and all that, was there
12 an IEP at all?

13 A. At that point, no.

14 Q. No.

15 A. No. There was --

16 Q. Did one get generated at some point?

17 A. Not a physical one.

18 Q. Okay. And --

19 A. Before I leave, let me know and I'll text him. I think he's
20 still on shift. If he has the picture, I'll get it for you.

21 Q. Excellent. You said radio and air time was a problem. How
22 many channels do you have to work off, fire ground channels? Just
23 one?

24 A. We have our main frequency and then we have fire ground,
25 which just bounces between, but it's basically the same. It just

1 cuts out the repeater.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. The only other problem that we had is we ran out of
4 bottles and amount of radios. We had an all call. I think
5 everybody but maybe six people didn't show for our callback.

6 Q. So you had 55 firemen and --

7 A. Around there.

8 Q. -- 49ish showed up?

9 A. Yeah. We have a few out on injury and then I think there
10 were like three or four that just didn't show.

11 Q. Okay. Is there any state interoperability plan that you're
12 aware of?

13 A. We called for a Field-Comm 60 out of Lowell, which is, I
14 guess, a regional asset that can kind of link radios. But by the
15 time, when I asked for it, I don't -- it never materialized. I
16 know the following day it was in our driveway. So I don't know if
17 they organized it for the next day, if they weren't available.

18 Q. Is it common to have fire companies from New Hampshire come
19 over to help?

20 A. Not for us, no.

21 Q. No.

22 A. We usually -- it doesn't extend past Middleton, Methuen,
23 North Reading maybe, depending.

24 MR. CURRIE: Okay. That's all the questions I have right
25 now. Rachael?

1 BY MS. GUNARATNAM:

2 Q. Yeah, so you mentioned, so you were going to all these
3 streets. Around 4 o'clock you started responding one after
4 another. Around what time -- and then the police department
5 wanted to set up a unified command and you mentioned MEMA, deputy
6 fire --

7 A. She was on her way.

8 Q. Yeah. State fire marshal?

9 A. Yeah. Yep, she was.

10 Q. State police, FBI, anyone else?

11 A. The DPW showed up, the DPW director, he arrived; the North
12 Andover Police.

13 Q. DPW is the?

14 A. Department of Public Works.

15 Q. Works, okay.

16 A. Yeah. Because they were, when we were -- oh, and emergency
17 management showed up.

18 Q. MEMA, right?

19 A. No. Our local emergency management.

20 Q. Oh, local. Okay.

21 A. Because one of the biggest concerns that we have at the DPW
22 is if they shut off power through the town, and the gas, our water
23 treatment plant can't run, which means there's no pumps for our
24 hydrants for no water.

25 Q. Right.

1 A. We would only have what they had in the tanks. So we
2 contacted them because that was starting to get a little nerve
3 wracking.

4 Q. Right. So what time -- do you know when unified command
5 started or when you headed over, it was formed or --

6 A. I would -- time kind of flew by. Honestly I don't know. It
7 would be speculation, maybe 6.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. I can try to find out. I know they called me on the radio,
10 so it'll be timestamped whenever they said that they were looking
11 for me.

12 Q. So is the police department in charge of that unified command
13 or --

14 A. They were organizing it, because they know we were strapped.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. Like the chief was actually -- he was out of the country, so
17 it was just basically me.

18 Q. Oh, okay.

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. So you were running it?

21 A. Um-hum.

22 Q. Okay. And so in that time period where you were responding
23 to all these accidents, did you see the gas company at all?

24 A. No.

25 Q. Okay. Did you call for them?

1 A. We called to get them to come and shut off the gas at 34 East
2 Water. A couple of my lieutenants, I remember hearing them on the
3 radio saying get the gas company to respond, but I don't believe I
4 saw anybody from a gas company.

5 Q. Did you get confirmation that they shut it off?

6 A. No.

7 Q. Okay. And did they --

8 A. We -- on 34 East Water Street, we shut it off at the meter.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. I do know that.

11 Q. Right. So as you were responding, did you shut off all the
12 meters to all those places, or --

13 A. My companies always do. Whenever we have a fire, you know,
14 we try to shut off the utilities, whether we kill the power at the
15 breaker or shut off the gas, if we have a fire in the house. As
16 for the out-of-town companies, I'm not a hundred percent sure if
17 they did or not.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. I know that night we went out with the gas company to shut
20 all of them off. We had a decent amount that were shut off. I
21 think a lot of people got scared anyway and shut their own gas
22 off.

23 Q. Okay. Oh, and when did you get relieved?

24 A. When did I get relieved? The chief came home Friday night.
25 He arrived at about 9:30, 10 o'clock at night.

1 Q. Oh, so you were working before, from Thursday --

2 A. Yeah. I went into the office about 6 in the morning and --
3 but from the scene, from these calls, whenever they first started
4 coming in, the first time I had actually seen the chief was 8
5 o'clock Saturday morning.

6 Q. Oh, okay.

7 A. He flew in, but I didn't meet up with him physically until 8
8 o'clock the next morning.

9 Q. Friday morning?

10 A. Saturday morning.

11 Q. Saturday morning. Okay. So you worked all throughout
12 Friday?

13 A. Um-hum.

14 Q. Okay. Would you have an idea of how many fire departments
15 had responded?

16 A. I think they -- this isn't all of them. Someone actually
17 sent me this picture the other day from I think it was Facebook.
18 The fire department put it up on the website, I guess, and it had
19 a thank you to all the departments, but they missed a lot of the
20 North Shore departments. I'll have to find it for you.

21 Q. Okay. We'll get that number.

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. Do you know how many homes in North Andover were affected?
24 Or -- sorry -- that were responded to?

25 A. That were responded to?

1 Q. Um-hum.

2 A. I think at one point the rough number that I got was 65 calls
3 in a matter of a couple hours.

4 Q. So when did you start to notice it was calming down?

5 A. It started calming down more towards late at night. We got a
6 barrage -- like I remember looking yesterday at the screen, our
7 IMC screen, which is our CAD data, and there was a whole line of
8 probably 30 calls in a matter of 40 minutes.

9 Q. Starting at 4 --

10 A. There was a whole, there was a whole streak of them. That
11 was a little bit more towards maybe 5, 6 o'clock.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. But then at that point, more towards night, it started to
14 calm down. When we started getting more resources come in, it was
15 a little bit easier. There was still a lot of people that were
16 worried, but that's when we started going out and shutting the
17 meters off. It probably calmed down -- what time did we start
18 going out with the gas company? After midnight, I believe, 11,
19 12. When we were down here we decided we were going to go out
20 with the gas company. They came out, they sent out their techs to
21 go out. We did one firefighter, one police officer, and the
22 techs, go door-to-door in the affected area. So I believe we had
23 1600, plus or minus, customers that were out.

24 Q. 1600?

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. Customers, okay. And when you said door-to-door, what was
2 zone that you were --

3 A. The majority of it was the Library District, which is kind of
4 like Greene Street, Main Street, then all the way down Waverly
5 Road from Mass Ave to Main Street down to a little bit towards
6 495.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. It wasn't a -- it's not a huge -- being 26.6 square miles, it
9 was not a huge area, but it's a lot of the older homes closer
10 together, like capes or the smaller homes.

11 Q. So we'll -- would you have that on a map somewhere?

12 A. I believe Columbia Gas has it on the map.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. The affected area, the map that we ended up getting --

15 Q. We'll need that.

16 A. The map that we ended up getting, they showed us like a Rand
17 McNally map, that was kind of circled where the area was. That
18 was our rough drawing in the beginning.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. I know when we met with them, they started turning on the
21 power, they had their grid maps and they had it all highlighted of
22 where the low pressure lines were that were affected, so --

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. I believe Jeff Faber had those. That's who I was working
25 with.

1 Q. So, that was around midnight you started going in that zone,
2 right, the --

3 A. Yep, and we finished at 5:30. As many as we could get done.
4 Like we weren't knocking on doors trying to get in. We weren't
5 going to force entry at that point, because you'd have to come
6 back anyway and check them the following morning.

7 So we were -- instead of going in at 2 o'clock in the morning
8 with a locksmith, it was just easier, whatever was on the outside,
9 or we would knock, check the door, and if it was open we would
10 treat it. But other than that, we would go to the next one.

11 Q. And you -- what did you do with the gas company?

12 A. The gas company shut the meter, shut it off at the meter.

13 Q. I see. When did they shut down the electricity?

14 A. They shut that down before we even left the command center at
15 North Andover. We got word from MEMA saying that, from the state
16 police channels, they were shutting down all power at all three
17 towns.

18 Q. Was that on the 13th or the 14th?

19 A. That was the 13th, Thursday night.

20 Q. Could you estimate --

21 A. Well, if I came over here, let's say, 6:30, 7 o'clock. I
22 came over here, it was before I came over here.

23 Q. Oh, okay. So it was in the evening, okay.

24 A. Yeah. But they only shut off that small section. They
25 narrowed it down to be able to -- just mostly the affected area.

1 Q. Okay. So you're water pumps were okay?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Yeah. Okay. And did you ever use any -- was anyone using a
4 gas meter?

5 A. We have them on all the trucks. So whenever we were going
6 around -- like that night, especially with the gas company, they
7 had their own and theirs are a lot more sensitive than ours. But
8 we have them on all of our trucks except the ambulance and pickup
9 trucks. But when they went out, they were always checking the gas
10 meter.

11 Q. So when did you actually finally touch base with the gas
12 company before -- like when you heard from them before you started
13 going out that night, like you must have heard from them?

14 A. At the command trailer.

15 Q. At the command trailer. So when did they arrive?

16 A. I guess they were here before we were, at the command
17 trailer. They were talking -- I think they had their own little
18 section set up and they were doing their talking. We met with,
19 you know, the key players at the fire services, secretary of
20 energy, the state police. And then once Columbia Gas was set with
21 what they were doing, they came over to have a meeting with us.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. I don't know what time that was.

24 Q. But that was at --

25 A. That was that night.

1 Q. -- when you first arrived?

2 A. Yeah, that was that night. It was within an hour of me being
3 here.

4 Q. Okay. So they were also part of the unified command?

5 A. They were working out a plan on their end, and they came in
6 to tell us what the plan was.

7 Q. Okay. So what did they tell you the plan was?

8 A. I forget his name, he just explained what was happening but
9 they didn't have answers of what caused it. That they shut
10 down -- they were bleeding out the gas and they expected it to be
11 at zero by 1 a.m. I never confirmed whether it was 1 a.m. or
12 after. He gave us a quick little run down, I believe, of what --
13 how many miles there were, and explained for some of the people in
14 the room that didn't understand the difference between the low
15 pressure and the high pressure how much was in it, that it usually
16 only runs up to about 1 pound.

17 Then as for their plan, they said they're just going to pull
18 in resources to go door to door, check the meters, check the
19 house, clear the house. But I think at that point he promised
20 200 techs.

21 Q. 200 what?

22 A. 200 technicians.

23 Q. Oh, okay. So what -- is that when you formed the plan to go
24 out?

25 A. When we started talking amongst the group, we said let's get

1 this ball rolling. If you got us those techs, let's go, let's
2 divide them up. That night we were told that we were going to get
3 20 crews, so we had to hold over 20 guys because we wanted at
4 least one firefighter, one police officer with each tech going
5 out, especially if they were going to attempt to force entry. We
6 didn't want anything bad happening to them. We ended up with
7 eight crews. I believe -- I don't know how many Andover got, but
8 because Lawrence was so inundated, they got the majority of crews
9 sent to Lawrence.

10 Q. Okay. So you got -- North Andover got eight crews?

11 A. Eight.

12 Q. Okay. And it was one firefighter, one police, and one --

13 A. Officer and a --

14 Q. Technician.

15 A. -- team of technicians.

16 Q. Oh, it was team?

17 A. They were like two in the truck.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. But at that point we were told we couldn't shut the gas off,
20 the technicians had to do it, and that was -- it was a little
21 frustrating because we do it all the time.

22 Q. Right.

23 A. Especially at fire scenes. Shutting it off at the meter,
24 it's just a quarter turn, it's very easy. We're all trained in
25 how to shut it off. But it was -- they wanted to make sure that

1 they physically touched each one to confirm that it was off.

2 Q. Okay. Have you ever responded to kind of a big accident like
3 this before?

4 A. Something of this magnitude? Oh, God, no. This is a once in
5 a lifetime, I'm hoping. I'm hoping.

6 Q. Have you ever received any training from the gas company?

7 A. Yes. Bart Maderios used to come in constantly. He used to
8 work for Columbia Gas. Every year he did probably two trainings
9 about propane, gas. I've had an academy impact class come in to
10 talk about gas, meters. We have a couple hazmat technicians on
11 the team that were on -- that are on the Mass team that every once
12 in a while to train us. Plus at the academy they've got the gas
13 school that -- I've gone through it not only in the academy but
14 afterwards.

15 Q. Okay. How many hazmat technicians do you have in North
16 Andover?

17 A. We only have two that are on the state team. Lieutenant Mike
18 Byrne and John McCullough.

19 Q. They're on the state team?

20 A. State team.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. We don't have a local team.

23 Q. Okay. Sorry, just going back to what you were talking about,
24 you guys did a staging area at one point. What area --

25 A. We staged the trucks. Because the parking lot at Saint

1 Michael's in between the school and the church is small, so we
2 kind of just had the cars there. And then once we started getting
3 all these trucks in, there's really no room for them. Plus we had
4 an active fire right down the street so the road was blocked. We
5 staged all the incoming apparatus at the middle school.

6 Q. What was the name of the middle school?

7 A. North Andover Middle School. There's three schools that are
8 right there. There's that one, then right up on the hill is the
9 Atkinson and the new preschool. But it's three large parking
10 lots, so we could handle --

11 Q. So Saint Michael's was nearby?

12 A. Right down the street.

13 Q. Right down the street, okay.

14 A. One -- the middle school is 495 Main Street. I believe Saint
15 Michael's is 195.

16 Q. So when did you set that up?

17 A. Once we started, they said longer distance companies were
18 coming in. Like Plaistow, New Hampshire, they started coming in.
19 That's when I said I need an officer out there to start the
20 staging so when they come in we have a place for them, instead of
21 just letting them drive around town.

22 Q. Okay. So around what time?

23 A. I just got to the command center. It must have been 7, 6,
24 maybe.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. It might have been earlier. I'm not good with time.

2 Q. Okay. So when you say 1600 were affected, 1600 homes?

3 A. 1600 meters.

4 Q. Meters, okay.

5 A. We were told roughly 1600 -- I think it was 1657 or 1612, I'm
6 not sure, but 1600 plus or minus.

7 Q. Meters?

8 A. Yes, meters.

9 Q. Okay. So would that be -- were any of those, were those all
10 residential like individual homes or was it also townhouses?

11 A. We have townhouses and apartment complexes that are down in.
12 Plus we have numerous schools. But I believe they were on the
13 high pressure; I'm not a hundred percent sure. And then we had a
14 couple of elderly complexes. I believe Market Basket was shut
15 down, which is over here. So there were some commercial.

16 Q. So did people evacuate?

17 A. Oh, yes. When -- something went out from the town along the
18 lines of, if you have gas service in your house, we strongly
19 recommend you evacuate until further notice.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. It wasn't a mandatory evacuation like Lawrence where they
22 said everybody leave, end of story. This was more of a we
23 strongly recommend that if --

24 Q. Right.

25 A. Because we didn't know the extent of it. So even if you were

1 country we didn't know if it was low pressure, high pressure, we
2 had no idea. It was if you have gas service leave.

3 Q. Okay. When did people start coming back in?

4 A. Officially?

5 Q. Yeah.

6 A. When their -- officially when their street showed up on the
7 clear list. On the town website we updated as soon as we got a
8 list from Columbia Gas, and we would update it and it was the
9 streets that you were allowed to return on. Not the streets that
10 you weren't allowed, the ones that you were allowed, to try to --

11 Q. Right.

12 A. -- give it a positive spin so people were a little bit more
13 calm about it. And as soon as they saw their name on that or
14 their street on that, they could return to their home.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. It meant it had cleared.

17 Q. Is that still on the website?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. As far as I know. It was this morning. But as of this
21 morning, we were -- I think it was 8 o'clock, 91.8 percent of the
22 town had power back. All streets had been cleared last night.
23 And just as I was coming down here, my street was the very last
24 street to be turned on with power. So I'm very excited about
25 that.

1 Q. So, the power was gradually --

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Okay. So what time was the first one, was it Saturday?

4 A. Saturday -- they had been turning it on, what was it, Friday
5 -- was it Friday night? I think it was Friday afternoon we had a
6 meeting here, myself, Andrew Maylor, the town manager; Andrew
7 Flanagan and -- the Andover town manager, and Chief Keefe from the
8 Andover PD. National grid had been reaching out to me they wanted
9 to start turning power on, so we met them over at Columbia Gas and
10 decided anything on the outside of the affected area we could
11 start turning on in pieces. Because like I was saying to you
12 earlier, the gas was this big, but because the lines don't
13 connect, there was this much electricity. So anything outside of
14 that grid we were trying to get people back.

15 Q. Right. And that started around Friday evening?

16 A. Yeah, Friday.

17 Q. Evening?

18 A. Friday afternoon, evening.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Whatever -- I think, I left here, a meeting at 6 o'clock and
21 shot right over there.

22 Q. Who would be able to give me times?

23 A. Of going over there?

24 Q. Of the power coming back gradually. Or is that on the
25 website?

1 A. No. That would have to be National Grid because when we gave
2 them that to be able to do that one. By the time I had returned
3 to town, they already had trucks on the street, the main road that
4 they were planning on activating.

5 Q. Right.

6 A. That had to have been a half an hour after we left that
7 building they had them on the street. And then there was a
8 confusion of -- they thought that we gave them a blanket
9 permission to start turning on power everywhere, even though
10 before the power company turns things on they are supposed to
11 notify the fire chief. So there was a little bit of confusion in
12 that, and they started turning on places that we didn't know. But
13 they were all outside the catchment area, so at least they were
14 staying out there.

15 There were a couple of houses that were in the affected area
16 that they accidentally turned on, but they were -- they kind of took
17 off on their own. So for the times of them coming on, I'm not
18 sure. National Grid would be the ones to tell you.

19 Q. And so once you heard they were turning on things you didn't
20 know about, what -- how did you respond?

21 A. We didn't realize that until after we had a meeting yesterday
22 here. We discussed that issue that I showed you those pictures of
23 the live wires. Because we came across that, they were
24 investigating -- Firefighter Crosby and Firefighter Dan Ryan were
25 investigating a fire on Herrick Road. A woman came home that

1 evacuated and asked if they would come over because something
2 didn't look right with her boiler. So then Firefighter Ryan went
3 over and when he was looking, they -- she had had a fire in her
4 boiler but had no idea. And all it did was burn the electrical
5 wires, expose them, and with the electricity back on now we had
6 exposed electrical wires.

7 Q. Right.

8 A. I want to say as of last night we've had 15 of those cases
9 where they were self-contained boiler fires, they melted all the
10 wires, and started energizing those. So we came here to address
11 that to find out what their plan was going to be. Are they going
12 to have electrical inspectors now reinspecting everything, which
13 is unfortunately going to delay the process? Or is it, you know,
14 you try to convince the public to shut off their own breakers
15 before our power comes back on.

16 Q. Has that decision been made?

17 A. Yeah, in a roundabout way. It was more along the lines of if
18 you come home and you check your -- you look at your burner or you
19 look at your furnace, if anything looks different, if you smell
20 gas, get out, call 911. If anything looks different, it doesn't
21 look like it -- you know, it looks like it might have had a fire,
22 flip the breaker and leave. Because the breaker, they're more
23 familiar with their breakers in their house -- well, most people
24 are. But we still do have some apartment complexes so people
25 don't know, they don't know where it is.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. But always call at that point and we'll come out and if we
3 have to isolate it we will.

4 Q. So when you were -- going back to midnight when you were
5 going with the gas company door to door, when did you complete
6 that?

7 A. 5:30 in the morning. I sent -- as they were clearing, closer
8 to like 5 o'clock, when you finish your list, they went -- I sent
9 them home. Because we had -- with the crews that were on we had,
10 Unit 4, which was doing their 24-hour shift and I knew I was
11 holding them over the next day. And the callback crew of Unit 2
12 had been working all night with this also, and they were going to
13 be working the 24 the next day.

14 Q. That was 5:30 a.m. Friday?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. We jumped really quick on that one. They gave us the
18 opportunity to do that, and Columbia Gas offered it, we jumped. I
19 think we were the first ones out to get them going.

20 Q. Yeah, okay. So 5:30 a.m., then where did you go after that?

21 A. We ended up -- I believe there was a meeting here in the
22 morning.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. So I regrouped over here, let the guys kind of relax a little
25 bit. That's when we ended up getting a task force coming in at

1 about 7 o'clock in the morning. We were supposed to restart doing
2 -- at 7 o'clock, going back out to address the ones that we
3 couldn't get into. That, I don't think we started until about 11.
4 There was a whole new crew that came in, so there was just a
5 little miscommunication somewhere along the line. One guy told
6 us, be back at 7 o'clock, so we had everybody there at 7 o'clock
7 and then they -- they got pulled out because Lawrence got pretty
8 much beat up, so most of the crews went over there and then they
9 worked their way back to us.

10 Q. Yeah. So you went back out to the neighborhoods around
11 11 a.m.?

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. And when did you complete that?

14 A. That was completed yesterday. I think we still had places
15 that hadn't been checked.

16 Q. Okay. Saturday?

17 A. Sometime during Saturday.

18 Q. Okay. So that's when you knew you had finished with the
19 meters?

20 A. Yep.

21 Q. Okay. And then so after Saturday?

22 A. After --

23 Q. Oh, you met with the chief.

24 A. Yep. I met with the chief Saturday morning at like 8
25 o'clock. I met with him. I met with the building inspector. We

1 kind of touched base of what was going on. The chief and I took a
2 ride around so he could see what had been affected, then we hit
3 the ground running.

4 MS. GUNARATNAM: Okay. Okay, that's all I got for now.
5 Angela?

6 BY MS. MOTLEY:

7 Q. My questions will be centered on type of training or
8 communications you've had with Columbia Gas prior to this
9 incident.

10 A. Okay.

11 Q. Part of the regulation requires the operator to have
12 community liaison, someone who is in touch with you. So I'm
13 curious to find out if -- who that person would be for you in the
14 past and what type of training, drills, emergency response plans
15 have been provided to you. Can you talk a little bit about that?

16 A. A lot of the trainings that we did, I always communicated
17 with Bart and I believe he retired. So --

18 Q. So when was the last time you would say that took place?

19 A. Oh, last year we had gas training right before Bart left,
20 before he retired. I think he retired last year.

21 MS. DOIRON: No, recently, more recently than that.

22 MR. ROWE: Yeah. So, because we had it scheduled and then he
23 ended up catching pneumonia and couldn't make it in. But we
24 rescheduled and we went through it. What he does, he comes out
25 explains gas, does little demonstrations for us.

1 The last large drill that I have done other than us going
2 over and going over the trucks and things like that -- we've gone
3 over to Columbia Gas numerous times and checked the trucks. The
4 last major drill that we did was years ago and that was out on
5 Sharpners Pond Road. It was a simulation of a gas line going.

6 BY MS. MOTLEY:

7 Q. What's the location?

8 A. Sharpners Pond Road.

9 Q. Sharpners --

10 A. Sharpners.

11 Q. Oh Sharpners.

12 A. Yeah. And I believe we were -- at that point because it was
13 right, it was out there and by the power lines, we invited
14 Middleton to come out and play, but that was years ago.

15 Q. So has Columbia Gas provided you an emergency response
16 manual, anything written, or is your --

17 A. Usually when the emergency response plans come out it's kind
18 of like the one that we get for a dam that's out in western Mass
19 that we have no idea where it is. They usually come in to us, we
20 take a quick look, and then they end up with the emergency
21 management director. Me, being the deputy chief, they usually
22 bypass my office and go right to the chief's, so I'm not sure if
23 the chief has them.

24 But we've always had a good training relationship. I know
25 Columbia Gas just built that facility down in Shrewsbury that they

1 have been inviting every fire department to come down. It's like
2 basically the fire academy but it's all gas stuff. That's where
3 their techs train and they're willing to bring us down. They just
4 completed that this year, I believe. Because the last meeting
5 that we had with Columbia Gas -- they usually get all the chiefs
6 together for a meeting every year, discuss their plans over what
7 they're doing, their infrastructure, things along those lines --
8 they invited us all down.

9 Q. In response to the emergency, were there things that you
10 thought could have been done better as far as, let's say, the
11 communication between your town and, or your office and --

12 A. Well, everything could be done a little bit better. But I
13 can honestly say on every day-to-day calls with Columbia Gas, if
14 we call for a Columbia Gas tech, they're there. Even if we have
15 propane and they're not responsible for it, they come out and they
16 help us out with it. So we've always had a great working
17 relationship with Columbia Gas, especially the ground crews. I've
18 never really dealt with the administration. And with a situation
19 like this, every -- the communication even now is still iffy.

20 There's so many people with their fingers in it that it's
21 frustrating. You get one answer from one person; you talk to
22 somebody else, you get another answer. It's, but --

23 Q. Do you have a direct person that you, if you have questions,
24 you can call?

25 A. We have a liaison. She was actually at the station

1 yesterday. She was assigned to us. Her name was Tracy. Before
2 that it was a gentleman; he's a former fire chief. I forget his
3 name. But it was rearranged and we ended up with Tracy. She sat
4 -- we actually relocated her to the police station to answer
5 questions and for us to communicate. But with her, we also have
6 been involved a lot over at the command center in Marston Street.

7 Q. Would you happen to know her last name?

8 A. Tracy --

9 MS. DOIRON: Stefanowicz.

10 MR. ROWE: Yeah, that's what it is.

11 MS. MOTLEY: Can you spell that for me?

12 MS. DOIRON: S-T-E-F-A-N-O-W-I-C-Z.

13 MS. MOTLEY: Thank you very much.

14 MR. ROWE: Yep. She's been a, she's been on -- she's been a
15 great resource. Like we'll ask her a question, if she doesn't get
16 it, she'll find it. But one of the tough parts is, you ask her a
17 question, if she doesn't know it, she's got to find someone and
18 then give you a call back. Where, when we were over at the
19 command center the last couple days, we've got some direct lines
20 to some people that she calls. So at least if didn't have the
21 information, pick up the phone and call them, and they can make it
22 happen a little bit faster. But for her fielding questions,
23 that's why we put her up there -- that's where our dispatch is --
24 fielding questions and being able to answer for everybody has been
25 a benefit. Instead of leaving her at our fire station, now she's

1 an asset to the police department also.

2 BY MS. MOTLEY:

3 Q. Your initial communication with the gas company, was that
4 with dispatch or --

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Is that emergency, that emergency number --

7 A. They have a number, it's -- I believe it's an emergency
8 dispatch number for gas events, and then there's Levels 1, 2,
9 and 3. They -- we would say, notify the gas company; they
10 notified them. From what I've been told, they notified them and
11 said, these are the list of issues that we're having, these are
12 the trucks that are calling for it, and I want to say that they
13 made a list also so they could send out a tech. But usually when
14 a tech would show up, they would get a call over here and they
15 would go to the next one.

16 Q. If I needed to get some information about whether the town
17 has Columbia Gas Emergency Response Plan, who would I contact?

18 A. Probably Chief McCarthy. I can always give him a call and
19 find out. It's either him or Jeff Coco.

20 MS. GUNARATNAM: We'll find that.

21 MR. ROWE: Add it to my list.

22 MR. GUNARATNAM: Want to add it your list.

23 MS. MOTLEY: Thank you.

24 MR. ROWE: You're welcome.

25 MS. MOTLEY: That's all I have.

1 MS. GUNARATNAM: Sheila?

2 BY MS. DOIRON:

3 Q. Yes. I just had a follow-up question. You had talked about
4 when you were down to the pickup trucks when all the other
5 apparatus was busy and doing other things. And you just in
6 passing you mentioned the best we could do at that point, because
7 you don't have CGIs, you don't have the equipment on the truck,
8 was just shutting off the gas.

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. Did you mean at the meters? Is that what you do?

11 A. At the meters, yep.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Yeah, we don't go in. Like if we get an odor of gas, usually
14 we'll go in with a meter and take whatever readings we had. At
15 this point, because everything was coming in as basement fires and
16 gas, odors of gas, it was just shut off the gas and either -- a
17 lot of guys were venting at that point. You would just shut off
18 the gas and open up a window just to kind of dissipate it from the
19 house and then move on to the next call.

20 Q. Was the electricity still on at that point?

21 A. At that point, yeah.

22 Q. It was?

23 A. Yep.

24 Q. Okay. Okay. And what would you say, without knowing
25 officially, are the meters predominantly inside or outside, in the

1 area you were looking at?

2 A. In the area? When we broke up the list, one was 95 percent
3 were outside; one was like 10 percent outside; another one was
4 80 percent outside. So it was very varied. I know within the
5 last year and a half they just moved mine outside, they moved my
6 entire street outside, and I'm in the affected area. Around the
7 corner down towards like Middlesex and Marblehead, they are all
8 inside. I think it's the older homes.

9 Q. Okay. And you don't turn street valves?

10 A. No.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. No.

13 MS. DOIRON: Good. Thank you.

14 MR. ROWE: You're welcome.

15 DET. LT. ZIPPER: No questions. You're outside of my
16 expertise area.

17 MR. ROWE: Very good.

18 BY MR. CURRIE:

19 Q. Julie left me some questions.

20 A. Sure. I didn't see her leave. I didn't even notice.

21 Q. So do you coordinate your run cards with other jurisdictions?

22 A. Yes. It's run through the Essex County fire chiefs. They're
23 the ones that compile all of the mutual aid. They're the ones
24 that do the agreements and set up the run cards.

25 Q. And did you use your -- did you text or use any internet

1 resources, try to use those to communicate?

2 A. To get assets?

3 Q. Yes.

4 A. Not that I'm aware of. I just called the dispatch.
5 Dispatch, I said, I need more pumps or I need more ladders.

6 Q. Did you call them on the phone or the radio?

7 A. Radio. A couple times because we were fighting for air, I
8 called on my cell phone, but they were so busy they were hanging
9 up on me.

10 Q. Okay. And we already asked if you had training with Columbia
11 Gas. And I think her final question was, are leaks common or
12 frequent?

13 A. Yes and no. They've got the grade leaks. So, yeah, they've
14 got the ones every once in a while that you get the leaks. A lot
15 of times it turns out to be sewer gas, but we have had some pretty
16 intensive leaks. I know there's a leak in my neighborhood that
17 they haven't been able to fix or they haven't been able to locate
18 really for a long time. But it comes and goes. I think that was
19 like a grade 2 leak, which is minor, so you've got a certain
20 amount of time to take care of it.

21 As for main leaks, we've got a pretty decent infrastructure
22 in town. They've been replacing them pretty aggressively. If it
23 is a leak, it's usually at the meter at the house or somebody left
24 something on in the house. But I can't remember any large leaks
25 that we've had in town. Small ones, yes, but not large ones.

1 MR. CURRIE: Okay.

2 BY MS. GUNARATNAM:

3 Q. If I wanted to get a map of the streets, I'm sorry, did you
4 say you who could --

5 A. Yeah. Jeff Faber.

6 Q. Faber.

7 A. He's the National Grid guy over at -- in the command center.
8 It's him, and I think Michael Reisen (ph.). Those two we've been
9 working with, but mostly Jeff. What they did is they took a map
10 of North Andover and they took the low pressure and the high
11 pressure gas lines and color coded them per Columbia Gas. Then
12 there also should be a map and color coded where their electric
13 lines are, so we could overlay and see which ones we could shut
14 off. So they had a map of all the affected area, highlighted in I
15 think it was red.

16 MS. GUNARATNAM: Okay. That's all I got.

17 MS. DOIRON: I'm good.

18 MR. CURRIE: Okay. Is there anything that we forgot to ask
19 you?

20 DEPUTY CHIEF ROWE: Not that I can remember. This actually
21 went very easy. Keep asking me questions. No, I think you guys
22 covered it. I can't think of anything else.

23 MR. CURRIE: Well, we'll conclude the interview. It's
24 10:55 a.m. Thank you.

25 (Whereupon, at 10:55 a.m., the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

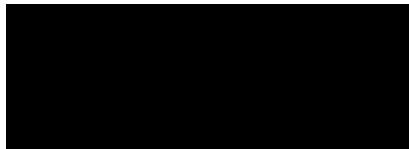
IN THE MATTER OF: MERRIMACK VALLEY RESIDENTIAL GAS
 FIRES AND EXPLOSIONS
 SEPTEMBER 13, 2018
 Interview of Graham Rowe

ACCIDENT NUMBER: PLD18MR003

PLACE: Lawrence, Massachusetts

DATE: September 17, 2018

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



Joni Hodge
Transcriber