UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	*	
	*	
CHLORINE TANK CAR RELEASE IN	*	
NEW MARTINSVILLE, WEST VIRGINIA	*	Accident No.: DCA16SH002
ON AUGUST 27, 2016	*	
	*	

Interview of: PERRY SEARS

Axiall Corporation
15696 Energy Road
Proctor, West Virginia

Thursday,
September 1, 2016

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: PAUL STANCIL
Investigator-in-Charge

APPEARANCES:

PAUL STANCIL, Investigator-in-Charge
Senior Hazmat Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

I N T E R V I E W

(9:20 a.m.)

MR. STANCIL: Okay. Today is September 1, 2016. It's about 9:20 a.m.

My name is Paul Stancil. I'm a hazardous materials accident investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board, Washington, D.C. I'm here at the Axiall Corporation facility, located at 15696 Energy Road, in Proctor, West Virginia.

This is in reference to NTSB Investigation Number DCA16SH002.

We're here this morning interviewing Mr. Perry Sears, spelled S-e-a-r-s, who is a chlorine shift loader for Axiall Corporation.

INTERVIEW OF PERRY SEARS

BY MR. STANCIL:

Q. So, Mr. Sears, if you would, just tell me a little bit about your background and how long you've been employed here at Axiall.

A. I was hired in January of '79. I worked (indiscernible) and I worked there for about 5½ years as a sulfur chloride operator. From there, in '85, I worked at 7 Circuit for about 8½ years, and since January of '94, I've been a chlorine loader.

Q. Okay. And so we're here to investigate this incident that occurred last Saturday, August 27th, where a, a tank car failed and released chlorine over by the loading rack. I understand that you may have been involved in handling the car prior -- at some time prior to the incident. Can you describe what your knowledge is of that car and the incident in general?

A. Well, I can tell you that I was working a double that day. So on afternoon shift, that car would have been on the back prep station, but having been returned from the shop, basically a new car for us, it was already prepped and everything. The afternoon shift -- or the dayshift had already prepped it so it was already unhooked, so there was nothing for me to do with it.

So at some point that afternoon -- I can't recall the time -- we made a change on that track, and that car was moved from the back prep station to the front prep station. So basically about the only thing I had to do with it was moving it from one spot to the other and then climbing over top of it to get to the car that was on the back prep station to prep it to be loaded.

And it was in that position till the midnight shift, and I believe it was somewhere in the neighborhood of 1:30 to 2:30 in the morning, Friday night, Saturday morning, whatever you want to call it. And we made a car change on that track and that car was put in position to begin loading and, as I said, somewhere around 2:30, my partner -- he was working the front end. He's the one that hooked it up and handled it and started loading it, and I did my normal thing on the back prep station to the next car. And I believe when we left that morning, when we were relieved, which was around 6:30 a.m. -- I believe this whole thing stated happening around 8:30. So basically the day turn did the same thing that we did and when they moved it up, shortly after they had moved it, is when it all happened. I had very little

interaction with the car itself other than moving it around.
Q. Okay. Was there anything unusual about that car that you noticed?
A. No, nothing at all (audio skip) any other car. You know, they, they get looked at a little bit when you see them out on the tracks to bring in. We weigh them before we bring them in to load them, and they just fall where they fall in the line of order, you know, where you put them. And from there, the front guy, he will go back and he will walk around, do a visual inspection of it and being a new car from the shop, it would have had magnets over the chlorine inhalation. Those would be pulled off. Placards would be put on it. And then whoever was on the back on day turn would have (audio skip) and checked it, bled off the nitrogen air pad. And when you do that, you pay special attention to the stand leg valves or liquid valves, so if there's any moisture in there, you'll be able to tell. It'll spray or spit a little something or you can even hear it with your ears, you know. It'll sound different.
So nobody said anything so I'm assuming -- like I said, I didn't -- I wasn't there at the time, so I'm assuming it was fine.
Q. You didn't do the prep on that --
A. No.
Q. -- particular car?
A. No.
Q. Okay. So when you do prep on a new car that comes from the

shop, you mentioned there was a nitrogen blanket on it?
A. Yeah.
Q. Is there anything else that you need to do with the car in terms of prepping?
A. Just -- well, when they come in, of course, they haven't been tagged or anything like that. You've got to put valve tags, liquid valve tags, the chlorine tags that go on the dome lid and inside on the safety. You do take all the plugs out. You open up all the valves to bleed it off and, like I said, play special attention to your stand leg valves or liquid valves to listen for any moisture. And then you just bleed that pressure off and put your tags on, put a stabber pipe in the side of it so it can be connected to load and that's basically about it. If you notice any defects or something wrong, then you report it and they'll tell you, well, let's set it aside or they'll come down and check it out and it'll be determined it's okay or we better set it aside. So --
Q. So you were there when the car was beginning to be loaded or the first --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- part of it?
A. It was on our shift when we began loading it.
Q. Was there any indication of any leaks?
A. No.
Q. You check for leaks or --

A. Well, after it's hooked up, to start into it, you have a bottle of ammonia water, some people call it snoop, you know, just -- and you just spray around, you spray around all the connections. Do that every -- well, right at the start, of course, and then go out maybe a half an hour to an hour later and keep spraying it around for a while and, you know, if you don't find that there's no smoke, no smell, then it's okay.
Q. So at the time when you left the shift, it was still in the same --
A. Um-hum.
Q. -- final stage of the loading rack?
A. Yeah. And I would guess it probably had -- we load those up most generally to about 260,000 gross weight and when we left, it was probably somewhere around the 200,000 pound.
Q. When you're loading a chlorine car, do you have to account for outage in the tank or is that factored in with the load weight?
A. It's factored in, yeah. There's always headspace left there. It has to be.
Q. Right.
A. Because if the pressure would build up and a safety would blow, instant liquid, you know, coming --
Q. So the load weight is stenciled on the car and that's --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- and that's your target weight for putting --

A. Yeah, and it's not exact. They'll have a light weight on there, but we will actually weigh it and sometimes the -- I guess because the car's been to a shop or something, for some reason, the weight might be up to 1,000 pounds different from what that light weight says.

Q. Okay.

A. I mean, I don't know, I don't know all the (indiscernible) that is, but, you know, a lot of them -- it's kind of rare really to have one weigh exactly what the light weight on the car says. And it's some -- sometimes I think it's due to even when you -- if it's been previously loaded and it has (indiscernible) in it, sometimes for customer requirements, we will pull the car into a complete vacuum and start loading it. Otherwise, just normal cars, we will just pull down to 10 pound pressure on it and then that way we're sure that it'll come off over 50 pound pressure on it, because it has to have at least 50 pounds before you ship it.

But at times, when you leave a little extra gas in there, I think it does affect the weight of the car. It might make it, you know, a couple hundred heavier than it would if it was empty and had a vacuum on it.

Q. So the car is actually sitting on a scale while it's being loaded?

A. Yes, it is.

Q. Okay. And how sensitive is that scale?

A. Very sensitive. You can -- well, it's 50-pound increments,

which I guess when you're talking human factor, that's not that sensitive for a car that size. I think 50 pounds is pretty --

Q. Right.

A. -- pretty --

Q. In terms of the pressure, you mentioned 50 pounds as a minimum. Is there a maximum pressure?

A. 108. They don't want us to ship anything out of there that comes off over 108 pounds.

Q. Is there a reason for that?

A. Well, those safeties will blow at 350 pounds, and I would imagine studies that they have done indicated that if you take it off at 108 or under, there's no way it's going to blow unless something seriously wrong happens. That's my understanding of it.

Q. Okay. Has there, has there ever been situations where cars at the loading rack have begun to leak for one reason or another or is that --

A. We have had one on occasion, maybe one of the valves that we load through or blow down out of, it might start leaking. We have had cars arrive that have had safeties that have popped and they leave a little mess there. If it's leaking, we put a cap kit on there until we can get it taken care of, you know, (indiscernible) on it and replace valve.

Q. But nothing --

A. It doesn't happen very often, but it has happened.

Q. Have you ever had a tank car at the loading rack that was

determined to have a crack in the tank?
A. No, this is a first for me. I've never -- I guess after 22 years on the job, I just -- it's something I never even considered would happen until now.
Q. So this is the first one in 22 years?
A. First one that I'm aware of, yes.
Q. Okay. At this same facility?
A. Um-hum.
Q. Okay.
A. It's something I just never even considered being possible to happen, but now I do.
Q. Yeah. So you all are trained in how to react to a situation like this?
A. Um-hum.
Q. Tell me a little bit about that.
A. A lot of it depends on the situation. I mean, if it's far enough away and you have time to get a SCBA put on, then you could do that and try to get some of the stuff done that needs done before you get out of the area. In Linda's case the other day, I -- she did a marvelous job, especially for being a new loader. Of course, she's got that fire training. She's in a fire squad and stuff. So she didn't panic and reacted quite well.
Of course, the first rule of record there would be self-preservation, I would think, and what she did was pretty amazing, just running in, grabbing a phone, grabbing a radio, and she even

took time to shut off her valves, which most people wouldn't do. And I don't know. It would be -- it's hard to say what you would do until you go through it because, practice it all you want, but you know there's no imminent danger there when you're practicing. When it actually happens, you know, you try to get an alarm out first if you can and, if there's anything you can do to keep anything worse happening, you try to do that, but you also want to get out of there, too, because it's nothing to mess around with. So I don't know. It just came out and --

Q. Right. Right. So you weren't here on the plant at the time the incident occurred?

A. No, I was home in bed.

Q. Okay.

A. I was awakened by my daughter. I was going to come in and work another double the next day, and she came in and woke me and said, Dad, Dad.

Q. Okay.

A. So I was awake then.

Q. Okay. Do you have any concerns about safety procedures here at the plant in dealing with the loading?

A. No. No, I don't. Not really. But one thing that would be nice, our room is kind of small, and I know -- I don't know if this is even doable. It would be nice to have a bigger room so we could have some SCBAs inside the room. Because all of our SCBAs outside the room, which if you've got a bad leak right there on

the spot, it's going to be hard to get out there and try to put that on if you've already got a leak going. So if that's something -- it would be nice if they could do it, but I don't know. That would be probably the only thing I can think of that would be an improvement on that.

Q. Okay. Evacuation and everything, seems to be trained to do there?

A. Yeah, I do.

Q. Okay. Other concerns, anything else that you're aware of, connected with this incident?

A. No.

MR. STANCIL: I appreciate your help, sir, and it's -- and certainly giving us your time to share your knowledge of this incident. I'll go ahead and terminate the interview, and I appreciate your help.

MR. SEARS: Okay.

MR. STANCIL: Thank you very much.

MR. SEARS: All right. Thank you.

MR. STANCIL: Thank you.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	CHLORINE TANK CAR RELEASE IN NEW MARTINSVILLE, WEST VIRGINIA ON AUGUST 27, 2016 Interview of Perry Sears
DOCKET NUMBER:	DCA16SH002
PLACE:	Proctor, West Virginia
DATE:	September 1, 2016

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.

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Kathryn A. Mirfin
Transcriber

TRANSCRIPTION ERROR FORM – PAGE 2

NTSB INVESTIGATION - DCA16SH002

INTERVIEWEE Perry Sears

INTERVIEW DATE: 9-1-16

The following mistakes in the transcription of the interviewee identified above were noted by the interviewee as follows:

PAGE	LINE	MISTAKE	CORRECTION
No. 4	No. 16		as a shift cleaner then to Cl_2
No. 6	No. 13		prepped & checked it.
No. 10	No. 4		pretty sensitive
No. 10	No. 21		pull a vacuum on it
No.	No.		
No.	No.		
No.	No.		
No.	No.		
No.	No.		
No.	No.		
No.	No.		
No.	No.		
No.	No.		
No.	No.		
No.	No.		
No.	No.		