UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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

Interview of: RICKY WELLS

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

JOHN VORDERBRUEGGEN, Division Chief
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Investigations
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

I N T E R V I E W

(8:19 a.m.)

MR. STANCIL: Okay. Today is September 1, 2016. My name is Paul Stancil. I'm a senior hazardous materials accident investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board. We're here at the Axiall Corporation facility at 15696 Energy Road, Proctor, West Virginia. This is in reference to NTSB Accident Investigation Number DCA16SH002. It is approximately 8:19 a.m.

With me in the room, we're conducting an interview of Ricky Wells, who is a chlorine loader for Axiall Corporation.

So we'll go around the table and introduce yourselves.

MR. WELLS: Yeah. My name is Ricky Wells. I'm an employee at the Axiall Plant here in Natrium and I've been here about 39½ years.

MR. VORDERBRUEGGEN: John Vorderbrueggen. I'm the chief of Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Accident Investigation Division of the NTSB.

MR. STANCIL: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Wells, for giving us the time this morning.

INTERVIEW OF RICKY WELLS

BY MR. STANCIL:

Q. Can you tell us a little about your background and what your job functions are here at Axiall?

A. Well, background, I've been here since, I think, 1977 or somewhere in that neighborhood. I worked in sales for about the

first 8 or so years, and then I moved into the chlorine department control room where I was for 25 years, and then I began to sort of ease my way out. I moved down to the loading department and I've been there somewhere in the neighborhood of 7 years now or so. And as a matter of fact, I'm preparing to retire on November 1st. That's about the whole story right there.

Q. Okay. Well, that's, that's very good. And so the reason we're here today, we're trying to investigate the circumstances related to a chlorine release that occurred last Saturday, August 27th, and we understand that you were working that day and had handled that tank car. So I would ask if you could describe what your recollection is and all of the procedures that were involved as you dealt with that tank car on that day.

A. Well, we were there, not that day, but we were there on the shift previous. We worked the nightshift, my partner and myself. And so that, that night -- first of all, I'll say up front that there was nothing in particular outstanding about that car or any car or the shift in general. It was just a typical night. We were loading -- we had three load stations there and we were loading on two of those and on one of them we were unloading a car.

And this particular car is one that we had hooked up with the flex lines and had started loading. I don't remember what time, but sometime during our shift, I think probably around 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, we had connected that car and began loading.

Nothing extraordinary either in the movement of the car or anything else. I mean, there was just nothing about it that attracted any kind of attention.

And handed the shift over to the oncoming shift, I think somewhere around 6:00, 6:30, somewhere in that neighborhood, and again there was no real discussion about anything in particular. It was just status quo. And that's pretty much it, you know. I mean, there are no fantastic facts I can give you. It's just that was, that was what happened that morning.

Q. Okay. Fair enough. So would you mind describing for us the general procedures for loading a tank car with chlorine? How does that work?

A. Okay. Let's just take one car, let's say that car. It comes into the, into the -- what we call the loading shed, which really is just a covered area, and there are basically -- there are three tracks inside the shed, but then each of those tracks has three particular stations on it. The first station, all the way in the back, kind of like an assembly line sort of an arrangement. So you bring the cars into the shed in the back, and the first station they come to is what we call the prep station, which is where the car -- actually that's the first place where the car is inspected. There are two people on the job. The person who runs what we call the front is the person who actually inspects the cars, and that happens when it comes up on that first station in the back.

So the very first thing that happens to a car when it comes in is the inspection, and that inspection -- there is a checksheet that, that I'm sure you'll -- somebody will give you one of those, and you'll be able to see what all's there, but basically it just entails a visual once-over to see if there is anything outstanding about the car. You know, what kind of condition is the body in? Are there, are there any rust holes or what's the paint condition? You know, are there bombs hanging off the rails, you know? I mean, it's just a general maintenance and safety inspection.

So once that's done, then the other guy, the other guy on the shift, the other loader, then he's more -- because the inspection part of it takes place on the ground, but if you can envision inside this loading rack, all of the loading takes place on sort of a midlevel catwalk sort of thing, and that's where he'll be. And what he does is he opens up the car, the dome, and then I will also then take a look inside the dome, you know, and see basically just what the condition of the thing is. And then he begins what we call the prep, which is basically just clean up, paint and remove -- at that point in time is when we remove any kind of heel or leftover, you know, from the previous trip. And sometimes there will be a little liquid left in it, but usually it's just, it's just gas, and we get rid of that.

And so when that process is complete, then that car will sit there until the front car, because -- okay. I didn't say that. We have three stations there inside the shed. Each one of those

stations will have a car on it because it's an assembly line, okay. But that's the end of that step in the back. So whenever the car on the loading station there is finished loading, then we just move the whole string up one car.

Okay. So that car then will move to the center station which generally doesn't have anything done there. It's just there. If you didn't get done with things back here, this is where you finish up.

And then, again, when the next car is done, then everything moves up one more. So that car now that you had brought in and inspected and prepped, is now ready to load on the front station. Okay. You with me?

And so when we had come in -- I'll go back directly to that car now. When we had come in, I believe the inspection and the prep steps had already been done, and so that car -- and also it had been moved up one step in the process. So it was on the middle station. Okay.

And so then at around 2:00 or 3:00, whenever it was, we made the changes. In other words, the front car finished loading. The one ahead, just ahead of the car, okay, that one finished loading around 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, and we just moved everything up one, which means the car in question moved into the loading spot.

And I was, I was the one -- yes, I was the one -- I hooked up the flex lines to it and actually began the loading process. And

that step, really again, I mean, no matter where you are in the process, you -- you're -- what I'm saying is that there's inspection actions, I'll put it that way, that take -- because all the time you're supposed to be -- you need to be looking at the condition of things, one, because maybe somebody before you looked at it and didn't see something; maybe they missed it. Maybe -- who knows what. But the point is to be aware of the fact that -- you keep your eyes open. And again, there, I didn't see anything unusual in the car that -- at least not that I recollect. And in my mind, that means if I don't recollect anything, there probably wasn't anything, and I'm like the third set of eyes that have looked at this car.

Again, now, that's only on the top part. I mean, that's in the dome. That's the only part I'm concerned with now.

So anyway, we go through that process and it takes, depending on certain variables, it'll take anywhere from 6 to 8 hours, or in that neighborhood, to load a car, and I think it was around 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning that we started loading that car. And, of course, we're doing -- you know, we did -- we made the change on -- this was on number 10 track, and we made a change on number 8 track also. Number 11 track was the unloading car, and it was just sitting there unloading all night, nothing -- we didn't do anything with it.

Pretty much from the 2:00 or 3:00, whenever it was we made the change, until about 6:30 or so, when the next shift came in,

nothing happened. You know, every hour you're writing down the numbers, the weights of the cars, you know, just keep track of the fact that they are moving along like they should and everything's normal. And that's basically all that we did the rest of that night. 6:30 or so, we left and -- and that's the last I knew of it until -- actually I think my son called me and said, are you listening to the news? And I said, no, I'm sleeping, because it was -- I think it was around 11:30 or so that he called. And he said, well, maybe you should listen to the news. So that's when -- that was the first I'd heard of it.

And that's pretty much, you know, unless there's something specific that you can ask me, that's pretty much my recollection of the whole deal.

Q. So during the course, when you're -- of the loading actions out there, do you check for leaks?

A. One of the things, the nice things about chlorine is that you really don't have to check for leaks.

Q. It'll let you know.

A. It there is a leak, it will let you know. In addition to the fact that we do have sensors all over the place out there, and there were no sensor alarms. There were no notifications from the control room, and there was no -- now, now that being said, you know, occasionally you'll get a little whiff of this, a little whiff of that. That's just normal. You know, you work -- we make it, okay. So occasionally you do have something like that, but

that particular night, there was nothing.

I'd like to say, well, you know, I remember exactly what the weather was like and there was a gentle breeze from the north. I don't know what it was like. I don't remember, other than it was hot and humid like it has been, and -- but as far as anything of that nature, there were no calls, no notifications, and no indications of any kind that there was any kind of a leak.

Q. If there had been a leak, what would've -- how would you have detected it and what would the procedure be to deal with it?

A. Okay. It could have happened probably two or three different ways. The first way is that the phone will ring, and it will be somebody in the control room, either the east area or possibly in the west area or possibly the sulfur chloride operator, because they have the Profox, the computer system. Okay. We have a PC that's network connected, but we don't have the actual Profox system, but they do, and that's where all of incoming alarms and things show up. Okay. So we would have gotten, if there was -- if there was a leak sufficient to trip a sensor, then we would get a phone call or a radio call from one of those places saying this particular sensor is going off, what's the deal? That's one way of getting notified.

The other would be that if it's somebody out and walking around and they just smelled something, then they would come up probably and say, hey, you guys got something leaking in here. The other would be that if we were just -- happened to be out and

walking around in the right place, right time, and we smelled something. That's pretty much the only ways that it would come to our attention.

Then once that happened, basically we get our little ammonia squirt bottle and start walking around and smelling. And if you smell something, I mean, it's just like a dog hunting, you know; you follow it until you tree it someplace and then you can pretty much localize it and then deal with trying to fix it, if it's something you can fix.

And -- well, if it's the typical kinds of things, then we can do that; we can fix it. If was something that we really couldn't fix, then we would probably, depending on how bad it was -- you know, I'm not saying I'm not going to panic, I can't do anything about it. I would either fix it or I would get in touch with somebody who could.

If it was something that was -- that I deemed necessary or prudent, okay, we'll just shut down. You understand what I'm saying? I'm not saying a leak means shut down automatically. Maybe it does; maybe it doesn't.

So I'm getting, I'm getting off track. I'm beginning to talk too much now.

Q. No.

A. A leak -- you've got a leak and then there's a leak. If it's just you can give it a squirt and you get a little puff of smoke and you can, you can smell it, okay, that's a leak. And that's

the typical. That's 99 percent.

Q. What's a typical cause for a leak?

A. Okay. Most generally -- remember I said on the back station, on the initial station when you -- it's almost always going to be when you're hooking a flex line. You hook a flex line to one of the valves in that car. On the back stations, we have what they call quick connects. There's no gasket or anything like that to put. It has an O-ring gasket and you just put it on there, tighten it with your hand and you're done. Those are the best. And generally, you don't have a leak there because that's -- to answer your question, generally it's going to be that. It's going to be when you connect the flex hose to that car.

In the front station now, it's a little different. We don't have the quick connects back there. We have what's called hammer locks. You know what that is?

Q. Yes.

A. With just a little white ring gasket, and those are notorious for leaking if you don't put them on right. I mean, if you don't, if you don't do a good job; don't get the gasket just right, don't get it tight enough, things like that. But normally you don't have that because I don't know how many times in a day, in a week, in a month and then a year you do that, and after a while, you just learn there's a way to do it and a way not to do it. But more than that, what you learn is if I don't do it -- if I don't do it right the first time, I'm going to be coming back here after

a while and fixing it anyway; I'd rather just do it right. So the majority of leaks would happen that way.

Now there are times -- the valves in the dome have plugs in them. Okay. They're plugged. When they come up on that back station, the prep station, all the plugs are taken out, the purpose of that being to see if the valve leaks, you know, if the valve just inherently leaks. If it does, then we try to fiddle with them a little bit to get them to stop because you can do that. There's any number of reasons why it might be leaking a little bit. A lot of times, it might not even be -- it just might not be closed tight. But that's the point, you take the plugs out to see if the valves are in, in good shape.

We have trip number -- we have trip counts on all the cars and all the valves. We change them every 18 trips or every 5 years or if they leak and we can't stop them. Okay. Those are basically the three things.

I don't remember. Again, I'd like to tell you this car was perfect, it had how many trips. I don't remember. I don't know. But I do know this. It was fewer than 18 trips. It was less than 5 years, and it wasn't leaking at the time. Because if so, then those things would have been dealt with on that back station.

As I recall that day, it seems to me like that was -- no, that's right. That was a shop car. That was a car that was just back from the shop. That's right. So all of that stuff, valves and everything in the dome should have been brand new.

Q. So this would be trip 1 of the 18 it was starting into?
A. It was starting into the first trip, yeah. I forgot about that. Okay. There you go.
Q. Okay.
A. A new car back from the shop is a little bit different than a car that's just coming back from a customer trip, because when it comes back from the shop, everything's new but it has a nitrogen pad, about 30 pounds or so of pressure, of nitrogen. And frankly, one of the things that, one of the -- if you want to call it a rumor or I guess maybe a point of interest would be -- somebody had mentioned, well, maybe the car had moisture in it, which would be a bad thing because if it had moisture in it and you put chlorine in it, then it's got -- all of that becomes HCL, which could attack the tank. I don't know. That doesn't make any sense to me. I mean, it's possible. I understand that process.

But again, that is dealt with on that back station. When you have a shop car come in, it has that nitrogen pad on it. If you open a liquid valve on a tank car -- you've got four valves in that dome. Two of them are gas valves and two of them are liquid valves, because they have a stand leg that goes to the bottom of the tank. If there's any, if there's any amount of water in that tank, you open one of those liquid valves, and you've got nitrogen pressure, what will you see coming out of the valve? You will see at least some kind of mist or something like that. And that's the procedure for determining whether or not there's moisture in that

car. And on the checklist, there's an item that says, you know, was the car dry? Meaning, was there moisture in it? Meaning, did you open it up?

In days gone by, part of that process was, and I don't know if I should say this or not, we used to actually remove one of the valves, shine your light down in there to see if you saw anything in the bottom. We haven't -- actually I have never done that. That was a procedure that was done at least 7 or 8 or more years ago, because that's how long I've been there and I've never done that.

But again, like I said, if there's any amount of water in the bottom of that car, and you open that liquid valve -- I know that. I know there was no moisture, I know the valves were all new. As far as the tank itself is concerned -- well, let's go back first.

On the moisture, just the end of that story is, why would it have moisture in it in the first place? Maybe a lot of people don't know, whenever we send a car to the shop, before we send it away, we evacuate it to the extent that we can, meaning we just hook a flex line to it and suck on it with the sniff system and they usually have pretty good vacuum.

But from our place, the car, I'm pretty sure goes to a wash shop someplace. They send them somewhere and have them actually washed out inside before they go to the shop where they're worked on. So there's where the possibility of moisture comes in, I guess.

But this car, as I recall, was back from a 5-year trip to the shop, versus the ones we send out that are 10 years. And that's important because the 5-year inspection, I don't believe has anything that deals with the tank or anything like that, whereas the 10-year would. But my recollection is, this was a 5-year car, and so -- because that's what everybody said. Well, it just came back from the shop, how could the, how could the tank fail because it just -- well, they didn't -- I don't believe they did anything relating to the tank at this particular shop visit.

And that's just, that's just something rolling around in my head. There are no real facts there, you know what I'm saying, and I just -- I've heard people talking about that, you know. There has to be something else going on here because it just came back from the shop. Well, that is true, but it wasn't a shop visit to deal with the tank. So --

I forgot where I got sidetracked, but --

Q. Okay. So you were talking about what typically happens when a --

A. Okay. Yeah.

Q. -- if a leak were to occur. Have you ever observed tanks that came into the shop that may have been leaking from the shell from cracks? Has that ever happened?

A. I have never seen anything that I would say was -- I mean, I have seen cars come in with what you would call cracks and holes and all that in the shell.

Q. Right.
A. Now we're talking about the shell. But I've never seen anything that looked -- that I looked at that and I thought, oh, boy, that's been leaking. No. And there's a difference. Well, the reason I would say -- I'm saying that I see a difference. I've seen cars that have come in that were leaking, had had leaks in the dome, inside the dome.
Q. Right.
A. And I know what that looks like. And what I see on cars, and there aren't that many of them, the cars that come in and actually have some kind of hole or anything like that in the shell itself, that's just, that's just -- it looks like your car, you know. It's like rust. That's what it looks like. Because you get a little something and then it starts and then it gets a little bigger, a little bigger, a little bigger.

Because that's part of the inspection, that initial inspection I was talking about, that's part of that, is to go over that car as well as you can and anything like that -- when you finish that checksheet, at the bottom of that checksheet is a, is a grading table, and you grade paint condition, body condition, and the markings, A, B, C or D.

And I -- in my memory, I can't recall ever marking a car as unacceptable because of a body, you know, the condition of the body. Because generally what we do is, if there is something like that wrong, then we just make a notation of that on the sheet and

then that car will ultimately either get -- during that three-step process in the shed, somebody else may come and look at it and say, yeah, that's -- we need to do something about that, and not load it, but that's not really usual. The usual is that it'll just be noted on the sheet and maybe after the car's loaded, before it leaves, it will go to our shop and -- if it's something that they can fix right then and there.

Now the difference, big difference, I'd say -- I've seen a lot of cars that come in and have leaked inside of the dome. It's a mess. I mean, it's just an oily, nasty mess. And so the answer to your question is no, I don't, I don't -- not that I -- I didn't see it that way, anyway. If it was something that was caused by a leak, I don't think so.

And by the way, I saw this one after the fact and I've never seen anything like that, no, nothing even close to it. I mean, I saw it from the outside, and then after they opened the shell up and seeing the tank and all that. I remember when I saw it the first time, which was just looking at the outside on the corner, on the shell, and I thought, you know, that that, that just looks different, you know. But, of course, it was a lot worse than anything that you would typically see on a car coming in, but I mean it just had a different, different look to it.

But no, anything that I've ever seen didn't -- it didn't ever turn out to be a leak. I'll say, I'll say that. Maybe it was. Maybe I've seen them and I just didn't realize it and it didn't

happen here. So -- but anything that I'm aware of, no, I've never --

Q. Okay. So loading the car, to what pressure and how much do you put into a car?

A. Okay. I have to go back to the first step in the process now, because once you evacuate the car in the first step, obviously would play a part in how much pressure was in it on the other end. We don't completely evacuate all cars. We do have some cars, some customers that are low ox customers meaning we do -- we put a vacuum on that back station. That's, that's not the usual case. Usually we bring them down to somewhere like 8, 10 pounds of pressure by a gauge, a certified gauge. And so typically then, when you start loading the car, that's about what it's going to have on it, empty, 8 or 10 pounds.

Now when you load the car, that pressure will increase and we have a max -- we have a range. Fifty pounds is your minimum pressure that you want in a loaded car. Fifty pounds why? Well, let me go the other way. The maximum pressure you want is 108 pounds. 108, who came up with that? I don't know, and I don't know why it's 108. I'm just telling you that's what it is.

Q. Okay.

A. It's like somebody woke up one morning, said, yeah, 108. I like that. Fifty, there's a reason. Fifty is because the checks in the valves need a minimum of 50 pounds to operate. So that's your minimum pressure that you want in a loaded car. Maximum

pressure is 108.

Typical pressure is probably somewhere in the middle of that range. I'd say probably 60 to 80, in a car, that when you're finished loading, has too much pressure in it or more pressure than you like. I mean 108, that's what, that's what the black and white says. I don't even like -- I don't like anything over 80. It just -- that's just me. So after you're done loading it, you can stack it and get whatever pressure you want, and that's generally what I do. If I've got one that's over 80, I'll usually open up the stack for a while and just get it down to 80 pounds.

What was this one? No idea. I don't have any idea. And we do not keep a record, a running record as the cars load of what the pressure on that car is. There is a check on the final inspection sheet where you write the pressure of your load down. I don't know what this one came off as. I don't know. But there is a spot where you mark that pressure.

Q. So how do you control the loading volume? How much goes in?

A. Volume is controlled by just a simple -- it's just a simple valve. Well, obviously you've got a flex line connected to the valve in the car. The car valve is open and you just open the liquid chlorine valve, which I think is like a 2½, maybe -- yeah, probably like 2½-inch line. Pour less in it, depending on looking at -- to me, I'm looking at the pressure gauge because I don't like to run a real high pressure on the flex lines. I just don't like to. I know they're supposed to be good up to -- but I don't,

I don't believe in tempting fate, and there's generally no great rush in doing this. It's going to take 6 to 8 hours no matter what you do anyway.

So you will get a car in and, of course, the loaders -- the loading stations are all scales. There's a scale there. In fact, that's how you tell how much you're putting in it and how much when you're done. It just sets on a scale, and generally a car will come in there, 85- to 95,000 pounds. That's just what the car weighs empty. And then in the paperwork you do this calculation and you come up with what the, what the -- on what your total weight max is. Okay. 263 is the limit, 263,000 is the limit around here.

So you have the tare weight of the car, the max weight of the car; the difference is how much chlorine you should put in it, and basically that's just all we do. We get a number that says, okay, if the car's tare weight was this, then what -- there's also the maximum load weight, too. When you look at a car, look at a chlorine car, you'll see these two numbers back here in the back --

Q. Um-hum.

A. -- and usually it's somewhere around 180,000 pounds. That's what your actual load weight can be. They're 90-ton cars. And so somewhere around in that neighborhood, it won't always be exactly that, but I'll always be less than that, less than 180,000.

And what you do on the paperwork is you figure out, okay,

once you calculate what the right load weight is, and you add the tare weight of the car to it, that's your finished gross weight, and that's your target. That's what you're, what you're shooting for. So whenever you reach that number then, you know, that number is for all intents and purposes, it's full. Shut it off, and you load that pressure we were talking about and you -- if it's too high, then you just open your stack valve a little bit and bleed off some of the gas that's on top of it, which eventually will reduce the weight. The liquid vaporizes. You blow the vapor off and eventually you, you lose weight.

You don't always have to do that. Like I said, it depends on whether or not you want to get rid of too much pressure. You will always do that to an extent because there's liquid in your flex line and all of that, and that's how you get rid of that. You open up that stack line and let the car pressure blow it back into the system and you do that until your lines are empty. Then you close your car valve and then you'll open your sniff valve, and that sucks the gas that's left in there, that just sucks that all our and takes it away.

So you end up, you've got an empty, evacuated flex line, your car valve's closed, and you disconnect all of that mess. And then sometimes, you know, we have gone through different stages where we leave that car sit for some period of time to see if those valves are going to leak after we've loaded it, and that will vary from, you know, a few minutes to up to an hour sometimes.

But the point is, at that point in time, the plugs aren't back in the car yet. But when the car is actually ready to leave, then the plugs go back in it. Again, there's a check sheet that the loader who finished that actual loading process on that car, he'll sign that, and he's basically saying everything that has been put down on the paperwork for this car, as I see it at this point in time, is all true and accurate and I'm signing it off to go; it's ready to go.

That went up. You come along and you -- your assembly line, you just push that one on through and then it parks maybe, what, 30, 40 yards up the track, and that's where this one was. As I understand it, they had just finished doing that and were pretty much walking away from it when this happened. And pretty much --

Q. Moving the car to that last stage --

A. Right.

Q. -- where it sits at, how does that happen?

A. Okay.

Q. What do you use to do that?

A. Well, we use the -- everybody calls it a Trackmobile. It's kind of like a Kleenex or a Q-tip. It's not a Trackmobile. The one they had before that -- a Trackmobile is a brand.

Q. It's a brand.

A. Yeah. And the one they had before for like 250 years was -- so I've got a feeling like they'll always be Trackmobiles, but this is a Rail King actually. But it's just a little, it's just a

little mover engine is all it is. And you've got your string of cars here, and whenever this one's full, then you just come around behind and you just push your string up.

Now the one, the one that's actually loading won't be connected to any other cars. The two behind that are still connected. As a matter of fact, they're still connected to the whole string, however many you have there. The one actually loading is not connected to anything and it's chocked and all that's separate.

And there's also a closure system that goes on the one that's loading. It's just an automatic system that will close the valves if that tank car moves any. Okay. It's -- there's a sensor there it's connected to. If that car moves a certain distance, then the valves will automatically close.

But to move those cars and all that happens is you just bring the engine around to the rear of that string. Then you come up, connect to that one, push that one on up, and if there are any other ones above there, then you connect to them and set them at their designated spots and then disconnect, come back, and again you'll separate the one that's being loaded and then the other two on the other stations back here, and you start all over again. It's a continuous process.

Q. Is there any possible way that the car could get rough handling in the process here?

A. Well, I mean, you know, that -- that's a matter of opinion, I

think, because I've seen some of the movements out in rail yards and even out, you know, in our -- and, you know, they -- those cars can get smacked around pretty, pretty hard, especially, you know, if you've got a long string of full cars. It's just a lot of -- a rail car has a hard life, no matter what you say. But in this particular part of the process, say -- how did you say that? Rough treatment?

Q. Rough handling, did it get whacked or banged around?

A. The only way that you could do that, in my opinion, or the only way a rail car can get this rough treatment is smacking them together. Okay. In the distances that we're moving, I don't see how anything that you could, that you could qualify as rough treatment because that first move is only about 15 feet. The thing that separates your string back here and your load car, you come up maybe 15 feet to connect to it. Then you push those up and sometimes you don't even hit anything up here. But if you do, you're moving another -- lengths of the distance. In other words, what I'm saying is, with the engine that we have especially, you don't have enough power to move that load in that short distance to gain any amount of speed that would qualify rough treatment. I mean, I don't see how you could do that.

But generally speaking, speed is necessary. That's what I'm trying to say. Speed is necessary to get rough treatment. But we don't generally move very fast, you know what I mean, and we have -- we do have some new people and new people tend to drive way

slower than experienced people. So, no, I don't, I don't think any time that car was moved after -- at least after it came into the shed, I don't see how there could have been anything that would have qualified rough treatment.

Q. Okay. Mr. Wells, I think we covered a lot here. Is there anything else that you can think of that any, any conditions that perhaps we need to look at?

A. Well, I'll tell you. The scary thing about this to me was apparently -- I think that's the key word for me, apparently -- there was no way to know this was -- there was even a possibility of this happening. And I hate to say this, but that makes me wonder how many other bombs there are that are just about ready to go off and you don't know. It makes me wonder, number one, and it worries me because, number one, I look around me and every day I'm right in the middle of the whole pile of those things. So that's one thing to worry about.

But then in the larger scheme of things, local papers around here in the last 3 or 4 days, you hear all this stuff about shouldn't be doing this anyway. You know, we shouldn't have -- we shouldn't be shipping this stuff and we shouldn't be doing this, we shouldn't be doing that, which, to me, is just foolish because, you know -- I don't want, I don't want you people up there. Well, if we are not up here, then you're not going to have your cell phone and you're not going to have your car, you know, because that's what we do. We make all this stuff that everything in your

life is made of. And so people want their cake and they want to eat it, too.

And you're always going to have that to some degree, but it troubles me whenever something like this happens because it stirs -- it's like kicking the beehive, you know. The bees are always angry but if you don't kick the nest, they'll generally just sit there and buzz and not bother you. And I don't like to see people -- I don't like to see things like this because it does -- it's like kicking the nest.

Q. Right.

A. But, but even so though, like I said, it is a troubling thing to know but -- or to believe, that apparently we had no idea, nobody had any idea that this was going to happen, because if we had, we'd have done something about it.

And so the question then is, what are we going to do -- just like you said in the beginning, what are we going to do or what can we do to, to eliminate this possibility. And I don't know what that could be.

Q. But in general, do you feel that you have the tools and the training and the knowledge necessary to do your job safely?

A. See, now that's, that's a tough question because, because -- the answer is yes but at the same time, using all of those things that I had that makes me answer yes is exactly what was being used on Saturday morning when -- so, so it's an -- I guess what I'm saying is this. It's an inherently unsafe place to be. Okay.

You can do so much to protect yourself but apparently there are just going to be times when it doesn't matter how well trained you are, how well equipped you are, or how knowledgeable you are or how experienced you are. Sometimes things just happen. Okay.

And that's, that's what I'm saying. That's the troubling part about it. If you, if you believe that you are 100 percent equipped, trained, experienced, knowledgeable, and everything else to do your job safely, yes. Do I believe that? Yes, I do. But I do also recognize that if I would have been here Saturday morning, there wouldn't have been, there wouldn't have been an ounce difference in me being here or whoever else was here because what happened would still have happened.

And, and that's the worrying part to me, is that nothing I can do personally could have changed what happened on Saturday morning, and Saturday morning could happen any time. I mean, that's the worrying part to me. So I guess I'm one of those people who says, do we here have anything that could have prevented that? No, I don't think so. Is there somebody somewhere who has what it would take to have spotted that? I don't know. I don't know how you would go about that. That's above my pay grade.

But as far as what, what capabilities we have here, I think we, I think we have everything that we need. Maybe need's not the right -- I think that we're capable of doing our job safely and effectively, but I think that there is a need to maybe --

certainly the need to investigate the possibility of maybe something else. Somebody said, well, we need some kind of big x-ray machine, you know, and we drive the cars in front of that, and it immediately shows this, which sounds, sounds stupid, okay. And that's what they were doing, they were just being stupid.

But on the other hand, you know, we've got -- whenever a car pulls up in front of the scales down here, you never see it and you'd never know it, but on the post over there, there's a reader over there that reads the GPS on that car and shoots up on the computer, here's the number and where it's been and all that. When the cars leave here, they pass a thing out there, and every car that leaves here gets a picture taken of it. I mean, stuff you never knew and never would have thought of.

So maybe it's not all science fiction, but I don't -- I just can't see myself what the answer to that would be. You can't just stop and do that kind of an inspection on every car every time it goes. It's just not practical. It can't be done.

I don't know what the answer is but I do -- I know that an answer -- there's one to find, I'm sure it is, and if we look long and hard enough, you know, we'll find it. But at this, at this point, I don't know what it would be.

MR. VORDERBRUEGGEN: It will help find that answer.

MR. STANCIL: So, John, do you have any questions? I think we've covered pretty much everything.

MR. VORDERBRUEGGEN: No, I didn't. Certainly nothing that we

need to continue on the record.

MR. STANCIL: Also, thank you so much. You've been extremely helpful and I appreciate your time this morning.

MR. WELLS: Thank you.

MR. STANCIL: At this point, we'll go ahead and close the interview.

MR. WELLS: Okay.

MR. STANCIL: Thank you, sir.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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|---|---|
| IN THE MATTER OF: | CHLORINE TANK CAR RELEASE IN NEW MARTINSVILLE, WEST VIRGINIA ON AUGUST 27, 2016 Interview of Ricky Wells |
| 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