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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: \*

PACIFIC GAS & ELECTRIC COMPANY \*  
SEPTEMBER 9, 2010 ACCIDENT \*  
SAN BRUNO, CALIFORNIA \*

Docket No. CA-10-MP-008

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: JOHN C. GROPPETTI

Anaheim Room  
Marriott Hotel  
San Francisco Airport  
1800 Bayshore Highway  
Burlingame, California 94010

Thursday,  
September 16, 2010

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to  
notice, at 8:17 a.m.

BEFORE: KARL GUNTHER  
Accident Investigator

## APPEARANCES:

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MR. GUNTHER: Hi. I'm Carl Gunther from the National Transportation Safety Board. We're investigating an accident that occurred on September 9th, 2010, in San Bruno, California. It's our identification number: DCA-10-MP-008.

First person, delegate your name, address, and phone number for the record.

MR. GROPPETTI: John Groppetti, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED].

MR. GUNTHER: Okay. And are you represented by counsel today?

MR. GROPPETTI: Yes, I am.

MR. GUNTHER: And would you please?

MR. JAQUES: Dane Jaques on behalf of the witness.

INTERVIEW OF JOHN GROPPETTI

BY MR. GUNTHER:

Q. Okay. What I'd like you to do is start back -- the investigation before the accident, September 9th, just give me a narrative of what you did and what you saw.

A. Okay. We had a project going on in Milpitas Terminals to replace the UPS system, which had failed a few months earlier. So as part of the project, we had to shut down one of the UPS distribution panels, because we had to replace the panel. And so on Thursday, whatever the date was -- I'm sorry --

1 Q. That's fine.

2 A. We were scheduled to disable all of the circuits off of  
3 that distribution panel so we could open the breakers, pull the  
4 panel out, and replace the panel. We weren't going to replace the  
5 panel that day. That was scheduled for another date. That day  
6 was just to clear the panel.

7 The construction crew was prepping the site and I showed  
8 up on site about 1:30, to start the switchover. We had a number  
9 of circuits we had to install temporary, little mini-UPSs on so we  
10 could keep those circuits alive while we were doing the work in  
11 the next -- over the next few days.

12 We basically -- I went through with the construction  
13 people what systems we were going to do and what order we were  
14 going to do them in. And so about a little after 2:00 -- maybe  
15 2:15 -- we started the work.

16 The local tech there -- Oscar -- called Gas Control and  
17 got a clearance to let them know we were going to be disabling  
18 circuits off and on, and so that Gas Control, at times, would lose  
19 data because of the work we had to do. And so -- and we  
20 had -- and so they would call him if they needed pressure readings  
21 or whatever during the day.

22 So we got the clearance started and we started working.  
23 The first system we took down, we have a cabinet in the control  
24 room that houses our chromatograph controllers and an ~~IOI~~ <sup>OIT</sup> that's  
25 tied to the PLC system there. So that's the first cabinet we took

1 down.

2           We opened the circuit breaker. We have our little UPS.  
3 We pulled out the AC wires. We put a little pigtail onto the  
4 terminal block, plugged it into the UPS, and brought the system  
5 back up. They verified the data was good and moved on to the next  
6 system.

7           The next system we did was the PLC has a power supply in  
8 the back that powers genius blocks, which is remote I/O tied off  
9 the PLC. Those genius blocks have both DC power and AC power. So  
10 we were doing two separate circuits, the power supply circuit and  
11 the AC circuit.

12           So we opened the breaker, killed the circuit, tied the  
13 two circuits into a second little UPS we had there, plugged it in,  
14 brought the UPS up, brought the circuits up. Everything came back  
15 to life. We verified that, yeah, everything looks good, and so we  
16 moved on to the next system.

17           The next system was the power supplies that provide  
18 power for all of our transmitter loops. Okay, this is probably  
19 the most critical of the bunch, because this is a lot of data.

20           So the first step we did in that process was the local  
21 tech put all of the controllers into manual, to make -- so that if  
22 anyone tried to open valves, they would just hold the valves  
23 wherever they were at.

24           ~~You~~<sup>WE</sup> put all of the controllers in the manual, the  
25 station looked good, and we then opened the breaker, killed the

1 power-to-power supply, tied it into our UPS system, and brought  
2 the system up. All of the data came back, so, okay, everything  
3 looked good. So we're moving on to the next one.

4 The next one was the communication room. We have a  
5 couple of banks in the comm room that basically have the equipment  
6 that interfaces the local equipment to the SCADA system in San  
7 Francisco. Some routers, data devices, and as such.

8 So we put another little UPS in that room and in that  
9 room, we actually put a plug strip off of the UPS, powered the UPS  
10 and  
11 they just basically unplugged one device at a time from its  
12 existing outlet into this temporary plug strip.

13 Got that done and brought that system up. Verified back  
14 with <sup>GAS</sup>~~staff~~ control that they had their data back, everything  
15 looked good.

16 We then had one more circuit breaker to go -- well, let  
17 me backtrack.

18 At that point, we figured we pretty much had everything  
19 back in that we needed to have in. We found one circuit breaker  
20 that could not be identified. I thought it was a plug strip in  
21 one of the control cabinets that had been abandoned, because the  
22 drawings showed no other power supplies that I could find.

23 When we opened the breaker, we lost the mimic panel in  
24 the Milpitas terminal. There used to be a 24/7 operation there,  
25 where they actually had operators working that -- actually

1 monitored the whole pipeline going south. And we had consolidated  
2 that a number of years. <sup>AGO</sup>

3 Well, we kept the mimic panel there. It's a nice  
4 display and when people are trying to explain how the gas is  
5 flowing, it's a good visual for kind of showing what's going on.

6 Well, when I flipped that circuit breaker, the mimic  
7 panel went dead. And I said, "Okay. There's something else going  
8 on here." So we started looking into it, and  
9 found -- finally found a drawing that referenced that circuit  
10 breaker. Unfortunately, the drawings that show that circuit  
11 breaker going to a terminal block with no explanation of what that  
12 terminal block was.

13 I found out, subsequently, these drawings were actually  
14 supplied by the manufacturer of the mimic panel and that's just  
15 how they came.

16 Well, we kept looking and we finally found another power  
17 supply that turned out to be the power supply that provides power  
18 for the mimic panel. It's got no control. It just drives relays  
19 to indicators and such.

20 So we -- I talked to the local tech and said, "Do we  
21 need to temporarily put this on or can we just leave it off until  
22 we're done with our work?" And he kind of indicated, "It would be  
23 nice to have it, because they use it off and on." And so I said,  
24 "Okay, fine."

25 So we decided to -- to put that into emergency power.



1 One note, all of these little UPSs we've put in, we put them all  
2 into circuits that are surprised -- that are supplied, what we  
3 call our emergency power, which is our generator power. We have  
4 two generators on site, and the UPSs, we figured, would carry us  
5 through until the generators come up, which is usually about 20 to  
6 30 seconds. So everything was plugged into our emergency -- what  
7 we call our emergency power.

8 We decided, eh, probably don't need to put the mimic  
9 panel on our UPS. So we just wired it into the emergency circuit,  
10 plugged it into -- we have wall sockets in there that are tied to  
11 the emergency power. So we plugged it in there.

12 The mimic panel came back to life and pretty much this  
13 took us to about 4:30, somewhere in that -- maybe 4:45, somewhere  
14 in that timeframe.

15 So we were basically done. Everything was running.  
16 Everything was fine. The construction people said, "Okay. We're  
17 going to stop for today." And the plan was for the next day, we'd  
18 come back and physically remove the panel and replace it with the  
19 new one.

20 They were cleaning up. I was sitting in the room where  
21 the mimic panel was, just making some notes and I had a phone  
22 call. Like, talking to my wife, actually.

23 So I'm sitting there talking to her on the phone and  
24 about -- well, I know exactly, it's 5:23, because I called her  
25 last night and I said, "What time is on your cell phone?" Because

1 I called her on her cell phone. So I verified that was 5:23.

2 I was sitting there talking to her and Oscar, the tech,  
3 was standing in front of the controllers and said, "Oh, shit."  
4 And I said, "What's wrong?" And he said, "I've got three  
5 controllers that have failed."

6 So I said -- I just told her, "I've got an emergency."  
7 And I hung up the phone. And I walked up to the panel and I  
8 noticed that -- on the two controllers I looked at, the pressure  
9 indicator on those controllers was down. And I said, "Something  
10 is wrong here."

11 So, the tech immediately went out into the backyard to  
12 check his monitor valves, to verify the monitor valves had picked  
13 up the pressure.

14 He came back a little while later -- a few minutes later  
15 and said, "Okay. The monitor valves are functioning and we're  
16 holding 385 pounds." And I said, "Okay, fine. We need to  
17 troubleshoot what's going on, what happened."

18 What happened with the controllers, I have no idea why  
19 three controllers failed, because they were all -- they had been  
20 put on a little, mini-UPS back in March, when we had our first UPS  
21 failure. And a local electrical engineer from Walnut Creek had  
22 come out, installed temporary plug strips, plugged in the mini-  
23 UPSs, which were plugged into the emergency power. So those  
24 were -- had been off this <sup>DISTRIBUTION</sup> ~~ridge~~ panel for -- since March. March  
25 31st, actually.

1           At that same time, I had come out two days later and  
2 installed a UPS on the two PLCs, because they were worried about  
3 them riding through a power glitch until the generators come up.  
4 So we had done both that work back in March or the first part of  
5 April.

6           So I said, "We have to figure what's going on here." So  
7 we -- I got the local GC guy and we just started looking for why  
8 did we lose the controllers. We had actually no idea, because  
9 they were plugged into plug strips that had been done months ago.  
10 So we were concentrating on the power supply, trying to figure out  
11 why we lost our -- our transmitters.

12           That -- we probably started that work somewhere between  
13 a quarter of 6:00 and 6:00, because it took us time -- two or  
14 three minutes to figure out what's going on here, before we  
15 started taking our ~~belt~~ meter and probing around what was going  
16 on.

17           The power supplies, indeed, had a problem. They  
18 had -- they normally run at 24 volts DC, and we were -- they were  
19 fluctuating between five to seven volts. And it wasn't a  
20 constant, it was kind of just bouncing between that. Which, to  
21 me, indicated we had some kind of a partial short or something  
22 was -- was dragging down the power supplies.

23           So we just started poking around. We pulled drawings,  
24 trying to figure out what's going on here, measuring voltages all  
25 over the place, trying to see if we could narrow it down.

1           At the same time, the tech was worried about his  
2 controllers, so I was trying to, you know, just keep my eye on  
3 everything, but concentrating on the power supplies.

4           And remembering, we had tied those things in about 4:30  
5 to 4:45 and they were solid. We had -- all of the data was good.

6           So, we were working on that and it took us to about, I'm  
7 going to say, 8:30, quarter to 9:00. We traced the power supply  
8 to a little terminal block in the back of the cabinet that the  
9 power supply has a single feed to this terminal block and this  
10 terminal block then has six circuits coming out of it. They're  
11 all jumpered on the terminal block. Six terminals coming out of  
12 it that feed six little fuse panels. And the little fuse panels,  
13 then, feed up to -- I believe there's 20 fuses on a panel, but  
14 they're maybe not all being used. But those, then, feed all of  
15 the individual circuits to all of the transmitters we -- the first  
16 transmitters and the flow transmitters we have in the yard. <sup>PRESSURE</sup>

17           So we are trying to figure out which circuit was causing  
18 the problem. So we tried pulling the wire, putting the wire back  
19 in, to try to isolate it. And we're getting sporadic results.

20           Eventually, we pulled all of the wires out and then just  
21 started putting them back in one at a time. And whatever we did,  
22 we cleared the fault, because we got all six circuits back in and  
23 our power supplies were back to a solid 24 volts.

24           So whether there was something partially shorting in  
25 that terminal block, you know, these are all twisted, standard

1 wire. There could have been a wire that didn't quite -- in the  
2 termination block and had been there for a while. But in doing  
3 our work, we had jostled it just enough -- I don't know, because  
4 once we cleared the fault, we had no more clues about where the  
5 problem was.

6           So, around 9:00, the power supplies were back up, a  
7 solid 24 volts, the station was back on line. We then made sure  
8 everything stayed good for a few minutes and then we started  
9 putting the controllers back to automatic again, to make  
10 sure -- well, to put the station back into automatic.

11           One step I took during that two-and-a-half hours of  
12 troubleshooting is because I was concerned that maybe the little,  
13 mini-UPS we had put in might be causing the issue with the power  
14 supplies, I pulled those power supplies off of the UPS and wired  
15 them back to the breaker in our distribution panel. Just to make  
16 sure I had a good, solid voltage behind that.

17           When we -- when we stabilized the system at about 9:00,  
18 quarter to 9:00, we then said, "Okay. We're going to have to get  
19 those power supplies off of the circuit breaker again." But we  
20 decided -- we were trying to decide do we do it tonight or wait  
21 until tomorrow morning?

22           Well, in the meantime, we had heard some -- something  
23 about a fire in San Bruno. I don't know if somebody called or  
24 whatever. Subsequently, we had people come out to the site. The  
25 foreman for the station was called back. There was a gentleman

1 that, actually, the GC crew worked for -- Jody Garcia -- was  
2 called to the site, basically to take a duty incident report about  
3 what happened.

4           When he showed up at the site, he said, "Don't touch  
5 anything." So we backed off of trying to reconnect the loop power  
6 supplies to the UPS. We just stopped work.

7           He took the incident report. Eventually -- our plan was  
8 we'd come back the next morning and do the -- do the cutover. We  
9 stayed at the site while -- well, a whole bunch of us stayed at  
10 the site while he took the report.

11           The supervisor for the station engineering  
12 group -- controls group -- came out to see what was going on and  
13 to offer any help. He, then, also called one of the engineers out  
14 of Walnut Creek to come out and help reprogram the three  
15 controllers that have failed.

16           The power was still on and they just lost their program.

17           So that engineer showed up -- I don't know it could have  
18 been 10:00, it could have been 10:30 -- I really don't remember.  
19 And he got the three controllers reprogrammed so they were back  
20 functioning. And we put them into automatic. And so the station  
21 was basically operating like it had before that.

22           We were then told to stay on site, because there was  
23 going to be a lawyer coming out later that night to talk to us,  
24 and then we also -- everybody on site had to do a drug and alcohol  
25 test. They were going to bring somebody out to do that.

1 The lawyer came out -- it could have been 1:00. Time  
 2 has kind of escaped me at that point. We sent somebody -- one of  
 3 the general construction foremen sent his apprentice<sup>TU</sup> in and out<sup>BULLER</sup> to  
 4 get us some food, because we hadn't eaten since the day  
 5 before -- that morning. So that was about -- I don't know, 12:00,  
 6 1:00.

7 The lady from the drug/alcohol -- that did the  
 8 drug/alcohol testing showed up about 2:00, 2:30. It could have  
 9 been 3:00. I was -- lucky me, I was the last one to do the test,  
 10 so I got out of there about 5:30 in the morning.

11 While we were sitting around waiting, we -- we had the  
 12 capability there, with our computers or our desk PCs that are in  
 13 station, we can call up gas control screens and see -- you know,  
 14 look at the same screens gas control looks at.

15 So being that we were trying to figure out what -- did  
 16 we cause something? Because we had no idea what was going on. We  
 17 ~~were~~ <sup>HEARD</sup> -- you know, an airplane crashed into the site? We heard all  
 18 kinds of stories and we didn't know what was going on.

19 We went to the computer and called up the SCADA screens,  
 20 just to see what was going on, on the pipeline. We knew it was  
 21 Line 132, so we just started at Milpitas and looked at the next  
 22 station down the line, which was Sierra Vista Crossover. We  
 23 ~~looked at~~ <sup>LOOKED AT</sup> ~~listened to~~ pressures in and out of that station and saw that they  
 24 were -- the screen is kind of small, so you kind of read between  
 25 lines. It looked like the pressure was between 385 and ~~286~~ <sup>386</sup> which

1 was basically what our monitor valves were controlling out at that  
2 time.

3 We looked at Lomita Park, which is further up the  
4 Peninsula, the same thing, three -- maybe a little bit higher.  
5 You know, we have -- transmitters have got margins of error. It  
6 was sitting like maybe in the 388 -- somewhere in that ballpark.

7 Then we looked at Martin Station, which is the station  
8 directly downstream of the break over in Daly City, and we  
9 saw -- I think the pressure we saw there was just a touch under  
10 390 or close to that, like -- as close as we can kind of squint at  
11 the screen.

12 So we said, "Okay. The pressure is going towards the  
13 break and leaving the break," you know, indicative that, yeah, our  
14 monitor <sup>VALUE</sup>~~value~~ took over like it's designed to and everything was  
15 fine. So we didn't think much of it.

16 And pretty much that was the end of it. The last word I  
17 got was all of the work on the UPS system was put on hold. We  
18 weren't going to do anything until we were given the go-ahead.  
19 And then it was just a series of meetings with lawyers and PG&E,  
20 and we're trying -- we're trying to figure out exactly what  
21 happened, which is very hard. Once that fault cleared, you can't  
22 find it any more. Trying to figure out why the controllers failed  
23 and whether we got a power glitch or something on that strip.

24 I -- it's hard to tell.

25 We saw some crazy pressures when we started looking a



1 little deeper, but they were all inside the yard and -- and all  
2 suspect, because we had a power supply problem going on. So, any  
3 radiance -- they're always going to be suspect.

4 ~~READING'S~~ The only readings we had for sure that indicated, you  
5 know, that the system worked, was looking at stations downstream,  
6 on 132. That's the end.

7 Q. Okay. So, let's see, let's define a couple of terms.  
8 "UPS"?

9 A. Uninterruptable power system.

10 MR. GUNTHER: Okay. So, I'll turn it over to Rick.

11 MR. NARVELL: Since I've got a different line of  
12 questioning for witnesses, can we just go ahead and let the other  
13 parties? And then I'll come back, because I've got a totally  
14 different line of questioning.

15 MR. GUNTHER: Okay. Then, Pete -- oh, Sunil from  
16 California PUC?

17 BY MR. SHORI:

18 Q. The kind of work that you folks were doing that you just  
19 described for us --

20 A. Pardon me?

21 Q. The kind of work -- the type of work that you folks were  
22 doing that we just -- you just described -- first of all, let me  
23 back up.

24 Is there a procedure -- was there an original procedure  
25 that you folks were following in regard to the work that you were

1 doing?

2 A. Yes. We a tailboard before we started the work and  
3 I -- we didn't have a detailed procedure, but I just pretty much  
4 scratched out, "This is the systems we're going to do and the  
5 order we're going to do them." Pretty much.

6 Q. Now, two parts. In general -- and in general and  
7 specially at this location, how often is this type of work done as  
8 a common type of work versus not common type of work?

9 A. It's not common. We were doing the work because we had  
10 a UPS -- our station UPS had failed and it was 20 years old. So  
11 this was a project to replace that UPS, so.

12 Q. And you talked about a local tech. Is there -- what do  
13 you mean by that? Is there a local tech and is there like a  
14 company-wide -- some sort of specialized representative? So are  
15 there different kinds of --

16 A. There were three people on site -- not people, three  
17 groups on site. There was the construction people who work  
18 system-wide, who were in specifically to work on this project.  
19 Okay? There was myself, who was kind of -- for lack of a better  
20 word -- watching over their work while we did this work and kind  
21 of directing it. And then the local tech is the gentleman who  
22 works at the station during normal working hours. That's his kind  
23 of headquarters. He takes care of the equipment there, as part of  
24 the maintenance department -- M&O department -- and as well as  
25 other stations that belong to that district.

1 Q. Now, the clearance that you had pulled for his --

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. -- how far in advance do you have to pull that kind of  
4 clearance?

5 A. Ten days. That's the standard.

6 Q. And how detailed -- what kind of information do you have  
7 to provide?

8 A. You know, I didn't do the clearance. That's the  
9 District's responsibility. That was left in their hands. I  
10 really didn't get involved with that portion of it, other  
11 than -- other than defining the times that we were going to be  
12 there working.

13 Q. So you don't -- so you're not the local tech and -- you  
14 go around. Where are you based out of or where do you go  
15 around --

16 A. I'm a contract -- excuse me.

17 MR. JAQUES: Let him finish his question before you  
18 start to answer. You've been doing that. Let him finish,  
19 otherwise the record won't be clear.

20 MR. GROPPETTI: Okay. Sorry.

21 BY MR. SHORI:

22 Q. As far as where you're based out of and based -- do you  
23 go to, I guess, different facilities as your work requires, in  
24 terms of -- you know, the type of work that you do, do you do it  
25 at different locations, so you kind of move around?

1 A. Yes. I'm a contractor, contracted with PG&E for  
2 specific projects.

3 Q. You referred to a mimic panel. Can you describe a  
4 little more in terms of what that is and what it used to be used  
5 for and what is the interface of that now? In other words, what  
6 is it used for now, if anything, at Milpitas?

7 MR. JAQUES: I'm going to object. I'm not sure he would  
8 have that information, since he's not normally based there.

9 You can answer if you're able to, but just make sure  
10 that you know the answer.

11 MR. GROPPETTI: I -- yes, I -- the mimic panel was  
12 installed when the terminal was rebuilt back in the late '80s.  
13 It's nothing more than a graphical display of the piping in the  
14 yard. It's -- with some indicators on there that just show  
15 various valve positions within the yard. It's got no control  
16 functionality. It's just strictly a visual display, so somebody  
17 sitting back can kind of just see a graphic representation of the  
18 whole yard.

19 BY MR. SHORI:

20 Q. And I guess the purpose of that, is that now replaced  
21 with something else? The kind of information, I guess, the mimic  
22 panel -- at some point, I would imagine it was used for visual.  
23 Now, is there something else in addition to that or that replaced  
24 that for that purpose?

25 A. Right now, it's more or less just used just when people

1 want to discuss how the pipes are <sup>FLOWING</sup> ~~flow~~ through the yard. It's  
2 just a big picture. They do have SCADA screens that they can  
3 refer to to get specific data within the yard. And they typically  
4 will go to the SCADA screens to get the data.

5 Q. And is there any -- I guess, then, any interface with  
6 that? So I understand that it gives you a visual indication of  
7 conditions that are in things at different places -- different  
8 points throughout the station. Is it -- does it feed anything  
9 back to anything else that that data is also used for something  
10 else, besides display?

11 A. Do you mean SCADA or the mimic panel?

12 Q. The mimic panel. Basically, we've got a signal coming  
13 in to the panel, that's what you see as a visual if someone looks  
14 at it. What I want to know is if that same kind of signal or data  
15 that's going to the mimic panel also then goes on to something  
16 else.

17 A. The information that shows up on the mimic panel is  
18 stand-alone information. The device that feeds the signal to the  
19 mimic panel -- let's say, for example, a limit switch on a valve,  
20 feeds relay which turns the light off -- on and off on the mimic  
21 panel that shows the position of that valve. That same limit  
22 switch also feeds the station's PLC, but they're separate circuits.

23

24 MR. GUNTHER: Okay. Bob?

25 MR. FASSETT: I just want to -- Bob Fassett of PG&E.

1           So, Sunil, just to clarify, so I understand what you're  
2 asking. Are you asking is that mimic panel used to operate the  
3 field in any way?

4           MR. SUNIL: Well, yes, that's part of the question.  
5 So, basically, it's -- I just want to know if it's a through-and-  
6 through signal to something else?

7           BY MR. SUNIL:

8           Q. So, based on the way I hear you describing this, it's a  
9 signal coming from a device to this, but from that device, signals  
10 are going somewhere else. But there's no series signal that goes  
11 through the mimic panel downstream to something else?

12          A. That's correct.

13          Q. You also talked about a power strip. Can you  
14 refer -- can you describe again what that power strip is?

15          A. Which one? I talked about three different power strips.

16          Q. Okay. Let's -- describe all of the three different  
17 power strips that you used, in order.

18          A. There are two power strips that were put in -- in March  
19 or April 1st, when we had our initial UPS failure there. At  
20 that --  
21 when that UPS failed, we also -- there were some controller  
22 issues, because we lost a lot of power to the controllers. They  
23 installed -- those controllers were initially plugged into the  
24 power strips within the control cabinet. They were concerned  
25 about those strips, so they installed two new power strips hooked

1 to little, mini-UPSs plugged into the emergency panel. And they  
2 transferred the controllers one at a time from the old power strip  
3 to the new power strip. The UPS -- the mini-UPS power strips.  
4 That was done in April.

5 The other power strip, we put in last Thursday night was  
6 in the communication area. We installed a power strip so that we  
7 had some place to transfer the communication equipment, which is  
8 all plugged-in equipment.

9 Q. Is this any specialized power strip? Does it have  
10 any -- let's go -- is it basically an AC power strip?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. And the power strips that you said you installed on  
13 April 1st in the UPS that failed, are they, again, a specialized  
14 component that was built into the device or is this a similar  
15 power strip that one would buy at a Home Depot, you plug in and  
16 plug things into it?

17 A. Probably a little bit bigger than the one you'd buy at  
18 Home Depot, because this has like maybe 15 circuits on it. It's a  
19 little big larger than the little ones you purchase. You get them  
20 at a specialty electronics store, most likely.

21 Q. Is there any testing requirements for that prior to its  
22 use, so that -- prior to it be at work?

23 A. No. You plug it in. You make sure you've got AC on it.  
24 That's it.

25 Q. So after your control -- can you tell me one more time

1 when you noticed that the pressure on the controllers was  
2 down -- on the controllers was down after the three controllers  
3 had failed?

4 A. About 5:25.

5 Q. You also talked about leaving the valves on manual  
6 or -- what was it that you placed on manual?

7 A. Before we started the work on the power supplies or  
8 anything that was part of the control system, we took the  
9 controllers. We have a bank of controllers that are actually the  
10 controllers for the valves. We took all of those controllers and  
11 put the controllers to come out of automatic and put them into  
12 manual. So that if we had any problem or -- we knew we were going  
13 to shut down the power supply, which means we were going to lose  
14 the pressures. If the controllers were still in manual, they'd  
15 try to operate the valves and open them up.

16 By putting them into manual, it held the controllers at  
17 their current valve position, and then gentleman could manually  
18 position the valves.

19 Q. Did you want to correct that?

20 MR. JAQUES: You said "manual" twice.

21 THE WITNESS: I'm sorry.

22 MR. JAQUES: Why don't you just start over and say it  
23 again?

24 MR. GROPPETTI: Initially, when we started the project,  
25 all of the controllers were in automatic, running controllers



1 controlled the valves. They were in automatic.

2 Before we started the work on the power supplies, we put  
3 all of the controllers into manual. That made sure the valves  
4 would not move if we lost any signals.

5 BY MR. SHORI:

6 Q. Was there anybody monitoring downstream pressure after  
7 those failed? So, in essence, at 5:25 is when you noticed that  
8 those controllers failed?

9 A. Yes, 5:23. And then I noticed the pressures at 5:25.  
10 I can't tell you what time Oscar noticed them, when it  
11 happened. I just know when Oscar said what he said.

12 MR. GUNTHER: Are we talking a.m. or p.m.?

13 MR. GROPPETTI: I'm sorry, I should have said that.  
14 This is all p.m. All p.m.

15 BY MR. SHORI:

16 Q. Back up for just one minute.

17 You were troubleshooting, you said. Why did this happen  
18 for two hours? So you started doing that after this point, so  
19 after the 5:25?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. And in order -- I've kind of lost track of how many  
22 controllers we have. I know you've got the two power supplies.  
23 But do all of the controllers or all of the connections that  
24 you're going to make after -- prior to putting the valves on the  
25 controllers back onto automatic -- so as part of this work, do you

1 have to have all of your connections and controllers done in sync  
2 before you go back, or is this -- is there partial control that  
3 comes back as you're progressing on this work? Do you do this in  
4 any kind of steps or is it all of the work that you're going to do  
5 is replaced, then you go back in and put the valve in automatic?

6 A. I believe I understand your question.

7 MR. JAQUES: Make sure you understand.

8 MR. GROPPETTI: Yeah, I'm not 100 percent sure I  
9 understand what you're asking.

10 BY MR. SHORI:

11 Q. Okay. After you placed the valve on manual, you're  
12 going to go back and start with your work. And, again, you talked  
13 about a lot of things in there, PLC, controllers, and such.

14 Is this the kind of work where you have to have all of  
15 your connections back in, all of the controllers -- all of the  
16 PLCs, anything you're going to replace, it has to be back in, and  
17 then you go back in, after all of that's completed, to put it back  
18 in auto, or is this in any kind of steps, that once you're done  
19 with these controllers, then you can go back and put the valves in  
20 automatic?

21 A. We waited until everything was done. Then we went back  
22 and started putting the controls into automatic. After we had  
23 watched the pressures, to make sure everything was good -- we  
24 checked the pressures, made sure everything looked good, then we  
25 put the controllers back into automatic.

1 Q. And so at what time did you say you were trying to move  
2 some of the connections around, and you said at some time you  
3 retained -- you regained the 24 volt --

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. -- on the power supply. What time was that?

6 A. Approximately -- sometime 8:30, 8:45.

7 MR. JAQUES: When you completed that?

8 MR. GROPPETTI: Yeah, I'd say probably closer to 8:45,  
9 when we cleared the -- whatever fault we had and the power  
10 supplies came back to a solid 24 volt. Right about 8:45. It may  
11 have been 9:00. It's just right in that time frame.

12 MR. SHORI:

13 Q. What was the communication at this point? So,  
14 basically, let's go back to the 5:25, when you -- when you saw  
15 that the  
16 controllers had basically gone and then I think you indicated  
17 that you had taken over -- the monitors had taken over 3-,  
18 whatever 386, or their setting.

19 What kind of communication did you have with anybody  
20 outside of that particular work group at that stage?

21 A. I had no communication. If the tech was talking to gas  
22 control, that would have been his thing. We -- we were just  
23 concentrating on the work in the station.

24 Q. And who contacted the engineer out of Walnut Creek?

25 A. I don't know.

1 Q. And do you know the name of who came out?

2 A. Which engineer? There were two people that came out  
3 from Walnut Creek.

4 Q. Okay. Let's get both names, if you know them.

5 A. Okay. Mark Kazimirsky (ph.) showed up at the site at  
6 about 9:00. And who told him to come out to the site, I don't  
7 know. We didn't talk about that.

8 He's the supervisor for the controls group in Walnut  
9 Creek.

10 He then contacted an engineer in his group to come out  
11 to help reprogram the three controllers that had failed.

12 Q. I want to go back one more time, as far as the question  
13 I asked earlier related to what procedure you folks were operating  
14 under, and you said you had -- you tailboarded --

15 A. Um-hum.

16 Q. -- what you were going to do. Was there anything  
17 written out -- if there's no established procedure that you're  
18 working on, so as part of that tailboard was there anything  
19 written out as to how you were going to proceed going forward?

20 A. I had just the real brief note I wrote out while I was  
21 tailboarding on just the systems we were going to take out, and  
22 what order we were going to take them out in and restore them.

23 Q. The replacement for UPCs -- excuse me, UPS -- is this  
24 done as part of your -- as part of your work? Are these kind of  
25 units in many, many places through the company as far as the UPC

1 and the same kind of devices? Are they at different locations,  
2 many different locations throughout the company?

3 MR. JAQUES: That's ambiguous. I think you need to  
4 clarify what you mean. If you're just asking if there are other  
5 UPSs in the system, ask that. But now you're asking if it's  
6 similar equipment, et cetera. I think that needs to be clarified.

7 MR. SHORI:

8 Q. Okay. I guess this is kind of in line with the question  
9 I had asked earlier in terms of how common is this type of work  
10 that you were doing. So, similar UPSs, similar controllers, is  
11 that part of your normal work at other facilities?

12 A. Part of my normal work or are they similar systems or  
13 similar systems at other facilities? I'm not sure what the  
14 question is.

15 Q. Well, I want to know what kind of work do you do or  
16 what -- or that you were working on in regard to here. So the  
17 type of work that you do, is this -- is this the kind of facility  
18 that you work on throughout the company and other places?

19 A. I have worked on other UPS systems within the company,  
20 yes. And they would be similar, because we try to keep similar  
21 equipment from station to station.

22 MR. SHORI: Okay. I think that's all that I have for  
23 now, Karl.

24 MR. GUNTHER: Okay. Pete?

25 BY MR. KATCHMAR:

1 Q. Hello. My name is Peter Katchmar. I'm with the United  
2 States Department of Transportation and PHMSA means Pipeline and  
3 Hazardous Materials Safety Administration. We used to be PHSFA  
4 (ph.), we used to be OPS -- you guys call us DOT. You know, we're  
5 going to go DOT and those valves today, or whatever. So, that's  
6 me.

7 Anyway. Thank you for coming in, I appreciate it. I  
8 just have a couple of questions.

9 We forgot to ask before we started, whenever you use  
10 acronyms, you know, we might now know them. So you used "OIT."

11 A. Okay.

12 Q. So what's that?

13 A. OIT is an acronym for operator interface terminal.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. It's basically a display panel.

16 Q. Great. And you have a good recollection of what you did  
17 that day. When you got to the fourth -- was it a communications  
18 room? And then you said that you verified with gas control that  
19 they could see again -- you know, see the station again. What  
20 method of communication did you use for that?

21 A. That would be the local tech, Oscar, who is the holder  
22 of the clearance, calling them on the phone.

23 Q. Telephone? Cell phone?

24 A. Telephone. I can't tell you whether he used the cell  
25 phone or telephone, I don't know.

1 Q. Okay. All righty.

2 Okay. You said that 4:30, 4:45, everything was back on.  
3 You were sitting in the room with the mimic panel and at 5:23  
4 Oscar said, "Oh, no." Or --

5 A. An expletive, yeah.

6 Q. "I have three controllers that failed." Are you  
7 familiar with back-up systems for controlling net pressure, if  
8 any?

9 A. I know how we back up regulation systems.

10 Q. Okay. Can you explain that?

11 A. There's -- PG&E typically uses two methods, either they  
12 put a relief valve in, so that if the regulator fails, the relief  
13 valve when the pressure gets to whatever pressure it's set at, the  
14 relief value will blow. Or, we put monitor valves in, which is  
15 basically another control valve in series with the regulator. The  
16 main difference being the monitor valve is usually a self-  
17 contained pneumatically-operated system. So that if we have  
18 electrical issues -- and most of our regulators nowadays are  
19 electrically controlled -- so if we have a regulator issue, the  
20 monitor -- which is all in pneumatic -- is not affected by any  
21 potential -- a single point of failure is not going to take both  
22 valves out.

23 Q. Great. Thank you.

24 You said at some point you heard of a fire in San Bruno,  
25 but it was after like 9:00. You said, "At 9:00, Milpitas back in

1 nominal." And then, I guess, the next statement was you heard of  
2 a fire in San Bruno.

3 A. I can't tell you exactly when I heard about the fire.  
4 It could have been while I was troubleshooting. It could have  
5 been while Oscar was talking to gas control.

6 Q. How did you hear, do you remember?

7 A. Somebody just said there was a fire. Nobody even knew  
8 it was San Bruno. They just said there was a fire somewhere in  
9 the peninsula.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. That's really all I knew until people came out and they  
12 gave us more information.

13 Q. Got you.

14 When you said you saw -- you went in and looked at the  
15 control screens and -- to look for pressures and things and you  
16 saw up to 390 at Martin, were those historical screens or real  
17 time  
18 screens?

19 A. No, those were historical trends.

20 Q. Okay. Can you get -- on whatever you did, can you get  
21 in to real time? Could you have gotten into real time with SCADA?

22 A. Yeah. Yes, sir?

23 MR. FASSETT: I think you said "390." Did you mean 386?

24 MR. KATCHMAR: No, he said "390." He said he saw  
25 approximately 390 at Martin.



1 MR. FASSETT: I think he said "almost 390."

2 MR. KATCHMAR: Well, I put "approximately." You know,  
3 close.

4 MR. FASSETT: Okay.

5 MR. KATCHMAR: "Approximately," "almost" -- whatever.

6 BY MR. KATCHMAR:

7 Q. So, okay. But you can get in and see real time?

8 A. I can't.

9 Q. You can't.

10 A. The local people have to. I don't have the access.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. Because I'm not a PG&E employee.

13 Q. Oh, okay. Okay. But, anyway, whatever was going on  
14 there, could that computer control anything?

15 A. No.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. Absolutely not. It's a read-only.

18 Q. Read-only. Okay.

19 And this is a historical question, how -- and you may  
20 not even be the one to ask it, but how did they know the UPS went  
21 out originally, back in March or before that -- at Milpitas?

22 A. The UPS went out and they lost some controllers, because  
23 the power died.

24 Q. Okay. Let me ask it a different way.

25 A. Okay. When the UPS had its problem at Milpitas, I

1 really --

2 I was not involved, so I'm not exactly -- so I shouldn't answer  
3 that, because I wasn't there. I didn't subsequently go out there.

4 So

5 I'm not sure exactly what happened.

6 Q. Well, let me ask it another way. Right now or just  
7 nominally it's on power -- graded power, right? The station is on  
8 graded power, is that correct?

9 A. It's always on <sup>GRID</sup> ~~graded~~ power. That doesn't mean feed.

10 Q. Right, the main feed is grid power. So in my  
11 understanding of UPS is that it sits over there waiting for this  
12 to go off, this grid power to go off, and then it picks up the  
13 load in between the time you're -- this -- the grid goes out and  
14 your generators can  
15 kick off, right? So it fills that gap.

16 So I guess my question is: If it's just sitting over  
17 there, how do you know -- if the grid doesn't go out, how do you  
18 know that it's not going to kick on or is going to kick on? Do  
19 you know what I'm saying? I mean, is it checked monthly or daily  
20 or?

21 A. The UPS that is at Milpitas -- the big UPS is called an  
22 on-line UPS. The power goes through the UPS continuously. And  
23 the AC gets transformed to DC, which is used to charge the  
24 batteries and then goes through an inverter back to AC. It's an  
25 on-line UPS. All power <sup>flows</sup> ~~blows~~ through the UPS.

1           So when the UPS fails, it's got an internal switch that  
2 bypasses the inverter and alarms go off.

3           Q.    Thank you.  That answers that question.

4           MR. KATCHMAR:  Thank you very much.  I don't think I  
5 have any more questions for you.

6           MR. GUNTHER:  Mr. Fassett, PG&E?

7           MR. FASSETT:  I have no questions.  Thank you.

8           MR. GUNTHER:  City of San Bruno?

9           MR. CALDWELL:  Yeah, Geoff Caldwell, City of San Bruno.

10          BY MR. CALDWELL:

11          Q.    Who do you work for?  What's the name of the company?

12          A.    I have my own company.

13          Q.    Called?

14          A.    Groppetti Technical Services, Inc.

15          Q.    Can you spell Groppetti for me?

16          A.    G-r-o-p-p-e-t-t-i.

17          Q.    And it's --

18          A.    Technical Services, Inc.

19          Q.    Thank you.

20          BY MR. GUNTHER:

21          Q.    Okay.  Now, I want to go through a little bit more  
22 definitions.

23          A.    Um-hum.

24          Q.    "Genius block," can you define "genius block"?

25          A.    Yes.  With PLCs -- which is programmable logic

1 controller, is what a PLC is -- it's just basically a device you  
2 program to  
3 control systems. It's to control systems.

4 You can <sup>BRING</sup>~~breathe~~ IO into the -- into the PLC a couple of  
5 different ways. You can hardwire directly to the IO blocks that  
6 are direct connected to the PLC.

7 The other way that's used quite often is called remote  
8 IO. And, basically, there are separate IO blocks that you can put  
9 anywhere. you can put them out in the yard. You can put them  
10 within a reasonable proximity of the PLC. They go anywhere and  
11 then the PLC communicates serially with them.

12 The advantage of using a remote IO is they have  
13 diagnostics with the blocks. So if you have an issue with the IO,  
14 they do some diagnostics and they're very easy to configure and if  
15 one block goes out, you don't lose the rest of the system, as you  
16 would with  
17 hardwire.

18 So they're just a way of interfacing field devices to  
19 the PLC. Genius because they've got diagnostics within them, so  
20 they're reasonably smart. They're not geniuses, but they're  
21 smart. But Genius is a trade name for GE.

22 Q. Oh, okay.

23 A. Yeah, I'm sorry.

24 Q. So, anyway, you also talked about a regulator or monitor  
25 valve. And, again, I believe at Milpitas, you don't have what is

1 like a regulator on a house or something. It's actually a set of  
2 valves that open and close and regulate pressure? So can we  
3 define that and get that on the record?

4 A. Yeah. Regulator or monitor valves are basically valves  
5 that will throttle to maintain a specific pressure.

6 Q. Right.

7 MR. FASSETT: Bob Fassett from PG&E. A point of  
8 clarification: Are you asking him to clarify the difference  
9 between a spring-operated regulator valve, like on a house, or in  
10 a distribution, as opposed to a controller-operated regulator  
11 monitor valve?

12 MR. GUNTHER: Yeah, that's a point. In other words,  
13 that we don't want to confuse what's out there with like a Fisher  
14 regulator or something.

15 So I just want to get that clear and get that on the  
16 record.

17 BY MR. GUNTHER:

18 Q. I also want to talk about the tailboard. Can you  
19 explain what a tailboard is?

20 A. A tailboard is just basically a discussion -- when  
21 you're going to do some work, whether it's the start of a work day  
22 and you're talking to the whole crew or you've got a specific job  
23 that you're working, a discussion with all of the parties that are  
24 going to be involved with the work. In this case, with the  
25 general construction people, the local tech, and myself -- to just

1 go through what we're going to do today and we've got to, you  
2 know, consider any safety issues we've got to consider and,  
3 basically, just line out the work so that everybody that's on site  
4 is pretty much on the same page.

5 Q. So that each man knows what the other person is supposed  
6 to do and what he's not supposed to do?

7 A. Right.

8 Q. Okay. Also, do you all do any drills? You know,  
9 like -- you know, I don't want to say disaster. But, say, drills  
10 if things go down? Have you done any of that?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Okay.

13 MR. GUNTHER: Rick Narvell?

14 MR. NARVELL: Can we go off the record for a minute,  
15 please?

16 (Off the record.)

17 (On the record.)

18 BY MR. NARVELL:

19 Q. This is Rick Narvell from the Human Performance Group.  
20 Mr. Groppetti, would you be able to -- subsequent to  
21 this interview -- be able to provide me with a work history of  
22 your activities in a general sense from approximately the 5th of  
23 September -- which is Sunday -- up to and including the accident?

24 A. That -- to the best of my recollection, yes.

25 Q. Very good. And we'll get that on the record subsequent

1 to this.

2           Could you tell us a little bit, just in general terms,  
3 about your health? Can you characterize your overall health?

4           A. I would say my health is generally good. I could stand  
5 to lose 20 pounds, but other than that, I would call it good.

6           Q. Okay, great.

7           A. Maybe -- no, I'd say good.

8           Q. All right, very good.

9           And do you happen to recall the date of your last  
10 physical?

11          A. It was either early this year or late last year. I  
12 can't -- I know it's been within a year. I just -- it was late  
13 last year or early this year, that, I remember. It was within the  
14 year.

15          Q. Okay. And your physician, did he have any notes of  
16 concern with your health? Did he say anything that was a concern  
17 or was everything fine?

18          A. No, everything was good.

19          Q. Great. Any medication -- do you take any medications --

20          A. No.

21          Q. -- prescription or over the counter?

22          A. No, none.

23          Q. And this would also include things like dietary  
24 supplements?

25          A. No.

1 Q. Can you talk to us a little bit about your hearing? How  
2 would you characterize your hearing?

3 A. It's -- sometimes I have to strain a little bit to hear.  
4 It's not that I don't hear.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. I can hear fine. It's just probably not optimal.

7 Q. Okay. And your age, sir, is how old?

8 A. I'm 63.

9 Q. Age 63, okay. And the same question as it relates to  
10 your vision, do you know what your vision rating is?

11 A. You know, I -- I can't tell you that off the hand. I  
12 did have [REDACTED] about three years ago. I seem to see fine.  
13 I don't --

14 Q. Okay. And do you wear any type of reading -- do you  
15 require reading glasses?

16 A. No.

17 Q. Okay. Okay, good.

18 Can you give us a sense on the day of the incident last  
19 Thursday, the 9th, just a general sense of your workload up to  
20 that day when you came on duty and throughout the evening?

21 A. Nothing out of the ordinary. It was a pretty typical  
22 day when I'm out in the field, and so there's nothing -- I wasn't  
23 tired or I wasn't -- it was just a regular day, a regular workday.

24 Q. And can you comment on or provide information about the  
25 workload from your -- the other fellows that were there that day?



1           A.    You know, I really don't know, because I was just on  
2 site that day.  And what had happened before that or what their  
3 normal workload -- I really don't have a sense for that.

4           Q.    Okay.  Very good.

5                    Again, while you were on site at Milpitas that day, were  
6 there any -- you have gone to great length about the problems with  
7 the UPS that went off line and back on March 31st, and you were  
8 working on it while you were there.  Anything else that  
9 came -- that comes to mind with respect to problems, failures with  
10 any equipment that you were working with that day?

11          A.    No, nothing out of the ordinary.

12          Q.    It could be electrical equipment, mechanical  
13 equipment --

14          A.    Everything seemed to be working fine.

15          Q.    Okay.  Very good.

16                   One last area of questioning here and then we'll have  
17 just a couple questions on follow-up for the operational aspects.

18                   Was there anything that day that may have been a basis  
19 for a distraction with you and while you were at Milpitas?  And  
20 let me give you a few examples, but not limited to these.  
21 Something, for example, like a recent death in the family, may  
22 have financial news, may have medical news -- something that  
23 perhaps may have played on your mind while you were working?

24          A.    Not that I can think about.

25          Q.    Okay.

1           A.    There's nothing that dramatic going on.  Just everyday  
2  stuff.

3           Q.    I got you.  And then I'll ask with respect to  
4  your -- again, your fellows that work with you, were you aware of  
5  anything that might apply to them in terms of this context here?

6           A.    Not that I noticed here.

7           Q.    Okay.  Very good.  Great.

8           MR. GUNTHER:  All right.  Sunil --

9           MR. NARVELL:  Just a couple of operational things and  
10 then I'll be done.

11           BY MR. NARVELL:

12           Q.    One of the things you had mentioned previous today here  
13 was we -- you talked or mentioned about three groups that were on  
14 site that day, and maybe I missed that -- or, if so, I apologize.

15                    The first was a construction group.  The next person or  
16 group that you alluded to was the local tech.  And I didn't hear,  
17 was there a third group on site that day?

18           A.    Me.

19           Q.    Ah, as the contractor.

20                    Oh, toxicological drug and alcohol testing.  A couple of  
21 things about that.  Do you know what time that you provided  
22 specimens?

23           A.    Oh, boy.  I want to say it was probably around 4:30 a.m.  
24 on -- it would have been the 10th.

25           Q.    The 10th?

1 A. Yeah, somewhere around -- I can't say that -- it was  
2 early in the morning.

3 Q. Okay. And what specimens did you provide?

4 A. I did a breathalyzer and then a urine sample.

5 Q. All right. And have you been informed of the results of  
6 those tests?

7 A. Yes, I have.

8 Q. And when and by whom?

9 A. On -- when I -- the breathalyzer, she gave me  
10 instantaneous and it was 0.00.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. On Monday morning, I got a call that I had passed the  
13 drug test. They didn't give me any numbers, they just said I  
14 passed it.

15 Q. Okay. Was that from someone from PG&E or someone else?

16 A. Yes, it was Jody Garcia.

17 Q. Okay. Very good.

18 MR. NARVELL: I think that's all I have right now.  
19 Okay. That's all I have for right now.

20 MR. GUNTHER: Okay. Sunil, from California PUC?

21 MR. SHORI: What, as a follow-up or?

22 MR. GUNTHER: Yes. We do a round of follow-up.

23 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

24 BY MR. CHHATRE:

25 Q. My name is Ravinda Chhatre. I'm an investigator of this

1 accident and I work for NTSB.

2 I came in a little late of the other activities, but I  
3 just want to check with you. All that you previously answered,  
4 you don't have to repeat your answer again. Just simply say you  
5 answered it.

6 Have you given your educational and experience  
7 background before?

8 A. I haven't yet.

9 Q. Could you do that, what your educational and experience  
10 background is?

11 A. Sure. I've got a BS in electrical engineering from Cal  
12 Poly in 1968. I got an MS in electrical engineering from Santa  
13 Clara University, and all I can tell you it was sometime in the  
14 mid-'80s. I don't remember the year. I'm a registered  
15 professional engineer, electrical engineering, in California.

16 I worked for PG&E for 35 years, predominantly -- the  
17 first 15 years in the construction -- general construction  
18 department and then the last 20 years in the gas-engineering  
19 department. Is that sufficient?

20 Q. Yes. Yes, sir.

21 And have you worked on -- have you worked on the  
22 standards of UPS configurations while you were -- during your  
23 tenure at PG&E?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. And which locations are those? If you recall.

PK 1 A. Antioch Terminal. When we initially put the gas <sup>SCADA</sup> ~~gator~~  
2 system in at all of the control centers, we put UPS systems in.  
3 I'm trying to remember, it's been a lot of years. Milpitas  
4 Terminal --  
5 no, excuse me. Brentwood Terminal. Those would have been some of  
6 the larger-size units. A lot of little ones, that -- you know,  
7 small to medium. But those are the bigger ones.

8 Q. And during the course of your activities for PG&E, did  
9 you do trouble shooting at the UPSs or just installation or both?

10 A. I've done both over my career.

11 Q. And based on your experience, if you can, tell you the  
12 typical life or does this particular UPS activity apart or  
13 different than the previous months? Can you compare or --

14 A. It's very hard to compare, because every station is  
15 different, just the way the power is configured. We try to  
16 maintain the same type of equipment, but the configuration of the  
17 stations is all different. So it's similar, but it's different,  
18 if you know what I mean.

19 Q. During your tenure with PG&E, did you have any standard  
20 procedure for doing standards on UPS?

21 A. No, there were no standards on UPSs.  
22 They're -- basically, it was a project-by-project and the  
23 troubleshooting is just when you have a problem.

24 Q. And did you -- did you ever think about what the cause  
25 for the loss of power was?

1 A. Are you talking about -- which loss of power?

2 Q. The one UPS. You said it dropped from 54 to four or  
3 five volts, the UPS. That would notify you of replacing or  
4 repairing it or troubleshooting it, was it not?

5 A. That's correct. Yeah, I thought a lot about what caused  
6 it, and the only thing that comes to mind is that we had a partial  
7 short somewhere on the load side of the DC that was pulling down  
8 the power supply. But I can't prove it, that's just what my -- my  
9 reaction to what I saw going on.

10 MR. GUNTHER: All right. Bob?

11 MR. FASSETT: Just a point of clarification.

12 The -- when you were asking about the four or five volts, you  
13 said, "And that's why you were replacing the UPS."

14 MR. CHHATRE: Well, that's the impression I got. That  
15 is not something to clarify.

16 MR. GROPPETTI: No, I'm sorry. I misunderstood your  
17 question.

18 MR. CHHATRE: That's okay.

19 MR. GROPPETTI: We were replacing the UPS because the  
20 UPS failed back in March. It had nothing to do with the four or  
21 five volts.

22 BY MR. CHHATRE:

23 Q. I'm trying to find a way that the UPS power supply. For  
24 this particular UPS -- maybe you'd better go back and explain  
25 that.

1           A.    Okay.  The -- one of the systems -- in order to replace  
2 the failed UPS, we have to -- we had to replace the distribution  
3 panel, the uninterruptible supply distribution panel -- the  
4 breaker panel.

5           Q.    Uh-huh.

6           A.    So in order to do that, we had to clear all of the  
7 circuits that were on that distribution panel.  And what we were  
8 doing on Thursday was clearing those circuits, putting them on  
9 little, mini-UPSs, temporarily, so that we could get that panel  
10 replaced.

11                   And the power supply was one of those sub-systems we had  
12 to take off of the breaker panel and put on a mini-UPS.

13                   We did that.  When we powered it back up, it worked  
14 until the problem occurred at 5:23, whatever caused that.

15           Q.    And I guess my last question is:  If it needed some  
16 thought that you couldn't figure it out, how do we know that it  
17 may not happen?  I mean -- I'm just trying to find out what your  
18 thoughts are on that one.

19           A.    We are looking at trying to figure that out right now.  
20 But right now, I can't go to the site.  We are -- we have been  
21 looking and trying to figure out what may have caused the glitch  
22 and that's just going to take some looking at.  Because once it  
23 clears, it's very hard to find.

24           Q.    I understand.  I guess where I was heading was, it is  
25 flagged in the future or is it something that you are planning to

1 do?

2 A. I -- I'm not the person to ask. That's up to PG&E.

3 Q. No, I understand. But did anybody ask you if you could  
4 figure it out what caused that, come back and diagnostic -- or has  
5 PG&E told you anything on that aspect?

6 A. They could ask, but there's no guarantees that we'll  
7 find anything.

8 Q. But have they asked you yet?

9 A. No.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. I'm sorry, I didn't understand that.

12 Q. That's okay.

13 MR. CHHATRE: I'm done. Thank you very much for your  
14 time.

15 MR. GUNTHER: Okay. Sunil?

16 MR. SHORI: I appreciate that we want to speed this  
17 through, and I'll keep the follow-ups very brief.

18 BY MR. SHORI:

19 Q. Just the process of -- you were asked earlier in terms  
20 of how did they know in March that the UPS had failed, and you  
21 talked about power going from the AC through the UPS and then  
22 through and through. So, I guess, do the batteries just go dead  
23 or does power stop going through the UPS and that's how they  
24 become aware that it's not working?

25 So, in other words, I'm not sure if it got answered in



1 terms of how does one become aware that it's actually dead?

2 A. Okay. The UPS has probably about 15 alarm points coming  
3 out of it. It tells you if you're on battery power, if your  
4 inverter's failed and just a whole bunch of other things. They've  
5 got alarms on the UPS that they had -- I'm not sure if they saw an  
6 inverter failure or that the -- I don't want to guess.

7 They got alarms from the UPS that said there was a  
8 failure. I don't know which alarms they got, because I wasn't  
9 there.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. But that's the indicator that something happened to the  
12 UPS.

13 Q. Okay. As far as operator qualification, are you  
14 qualified for any -- are you covered by PG&E's OQ plan for any  
15 cover tests?

16 A. No.

17 Q. And as far as the number of folks in your company, are  
18 you it? Are there other employees? Or how big is the company?

19 A. It's just me.

20 Q. And as part of your troubleshooting process, you said  
21 you kind of moved around the power supply connections and that's  
22 what --

23 A. Say that again?

24 Q. As part of your troubleshooting process, you talked  
25 about you kind of moved around some connections and then finally

1 something took?

2 A. Correct.

3 Q. What was that again? If you could clarify.

4 A. The power supply has a feed coming out of it, a single  
5 feed coming out of it, and that goes through a terminal block -- a  
6 set of terminal blocks which are all jumpered together. And then  
7 out of the other side of that terminal block are six more feeds.

8 So

9 we've got one feed feeding six feeds. And then those six feeds  
10 feed fuse panels, six fuse panels, which then further distributes  
11 the power out. So with that terminal block, where the initial  
12 feed comes in and the six feeds go out.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Those are the wires we were trying to find out.

15 Q. Okay. And there were three failed controllers, I think,  
16 that had been in place since March. Were you referring to the  
17 temporary -- the temporary UPSs or what were you referring from  
18 March that were in place?

19 A. I'm sorry, I don't quite . . .

20 Q. I think you had said there were three -- okay. Three  
21 failed controllers in place -- the failure in March.

22 A. No, that's not what I said.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. I said that night three controllers failed. I did say  
25 that back in March when the UPS failed, they lost some controllers

1 that time. But that was a separate incident and they came out and  
2 fixed them. But the three controllers that I'm referring to  
3 failed that night.

4 Q. Okay. And there were some temporary UPSs put in place  
5 at that time?

6 A. No, those UPSs -- when they had the initial UPS failure  
7 in March -- March 31st -- at that time, the next day, April 1st,  
8 they came out and put two temporary UPSs on the two controller  
9 banks. I didn't do that work, somebody else did. And that was  
10 because they were worried about the UPS and they wanted -- the  
11 controllers are supposed to fail and come back with their program.  
12 Some of them didn't come back and they were worried about that.  
13 So they put little temporary UPSs on until we could get  
14 the -- this project rolling.

15 Q. And so -- and my last question, so by the time that you  
16 had finished and you saw the voltage drop, those temporaries had  
17 been replaced by the work you folks were doing?

18 A. No, we never touched those.

19 Q. Okay. All right.

20 MR. GUNTHER: Okay. Bob? Bob Fassett, PG&E?

21 BY MR. FASSETT:

22 Q. Thank you, a point of clarification.

23 Did you mean to say that if the controller fails,  
24 they're supposed to come back up with their program?

25 A. Yeah.

1 MR. FASSETT: Thank you.

2 MR. GUNTHER: Pete?

3 BY MR. KATCHMAR:

4 Q. Peter Katchmar from PSP again.

5 I don't have any other follow-up questions, but I always  
6 ask, is there anything that you think we ought to know that you  
7 haven't told us?

8 A. No, that's how I remember the evening.

9 Q. Right. And he's going to explain to you that you're  
10 going to get a copy of this before it goes into the record and all  
11 of that, so you can review it or fix it or whatever.

12 But if there is -- and you will have our contact list --  
13 and your attorney there knows how to get in touch with us -- if  
14 you think of something that you think we need to know, please get  
15 in touch with the NTSB and let them know.

16 A. Okay.

17 Q. Thank you.

18 MR. GUNTHER: Okay. PG&E?

19 MR. FASSETT: No further questions.

20 MR. GUNTHER: City of San Bruno?

21 BY MR. CALDWELL:

22 Q. A quick question: So you worked as an employee of PG&E  
23 for --

24 A. Thirty-five years.

25 Q. -- 35 years. And then started your own company -- to

1 contract. And that was when?

2 A. 2004.

3 Q. Okay. Thank you.

4 MR. GUNTHER: All right. Does anyone else have any  
5 follow-up questions? All right.

6 Is there any statement that you would like to make for  
7 the record?

8 MR.. GROPPETTI: No.

9 MR. GUNTHER: Okay. Thank you for your cooperation. We  
10 are off the record.

11 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the  
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD


IN THE MATTER OF: PACIFIC GAS & ELECTRIC COMPANY  
SEPTEMBER 9, 2010 ACCIDENT  
SAN BRUNO, CALIFORNIA  
Interview of John Groppetti

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-10-MP-008

PLACE: Burlingame, California

DATE: September 16, 2010

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,  
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been compared to  
the recording accomplished at the hearing.

  
Richard Friant *RF*  
Official Reporter