UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	*	
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PACIFIC GAS & ELECTRIC COMPANY	*	
SEPTEMBER 9, 2010 ACCIDENT	*	Docket No. DCA-10-MP-008
SAN BRUNO, CALIFORNIA	*	
	*	

Interview of: MICHAEL VALENTI

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 6:46 p.m.

BEFORE: KARL GUNTHER
Accident Investigator

APPEARANCES:

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I N D E X

I N T E R V I E W

(6:46 p.m.)

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

I'd like to advise you that you can have one person of your choosing as counsel and that can be anyone you want. Have you chosen a counsel today?

MR. VALENTI: I have.

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

INTERVIEW OF MICHAEL VALENTI

BY MR. GUNTHER:

Q. And, let's see, for the record, I want to get your name, address, and phone number.

A. Michael Valenti, V-a-l-e-n-t-i, [redacted].

That's [redacted]

Q. Okay. What I'd like you to do is go back to September 9th -- oh, one thing.

MR. GUNTHER: I'd like everybody to go around the room and everybody can introduce themselves.

MR. FASSETT: Bob Fassett, PG&E.

MR. CHHATRE: Ravi Chhatre, NTSB. I'm the investigator in charge of this accident.

MR. KATCHMAR: The gentleman who will be sitting here in

just a few minutes, Sunil Shori, with the California PUC.

I'm Peter Katchmar with the U.S. DOT, PHMSA, Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration.

MR. GUNTHER: Karl Gunther, NTSB.

MS. MAZZANTI: Debbie Mazzanti, IBEW, Local 1245.

MR. SPERRY: Joshua Sperry, Engineers and Scientists of California, Local 20.

BY MR. GUNTHER:

Q. Okay. Like I said, what I want you to do now is go back to September 9th, just start at the beginning and what did you do and what did you see?

A. Okay. Well, I arrived at work that morning at 5:30, where -- which was my starting time. And at that point, I had received a turnover for -- during the shift change from the previous operator that I was relieving, who had worked the night before. And at that point, after receiving the turnover, I sat down at the controls, logged into the computers and started my day.

Q. Okay. Could I have your job title?

A. I'm a gas system operator.

Q. And for?

A. The gas system operations department for PG&E.

Q. Okay. What kind of formal education do you have? Degrees? Diploma?

A. One year of JC and that's it.

Q. Okay. Do you have any courses that you've taken through PG&E or other courses?

A. I have. I've taken customer service courses and computer courses.

Q. Okay. And are you qualified under PG&E's OQ program?

A. Yes, I am.

MR. GUNTHER: All right. Peter, from PHMSA, why don't you go next?

BY MR. KATCHMAR:

Q. Some of these questions are going to be based on what we know from previous people. I guess we've talked to a senior transmission coordinator and a transmission coordinator. So now I understand that the hierarchy is that now we're talking to gas systems operations. So you're a controller and you're the one that actually carries out their orders?

A. That's correct. I am an operator.

Q. Okay. Were you -- obviously you were on duty, but were you in communications with Milpitas Station on the 9th?

A. I had received one phone call from the field of the crew working in Milpitas that night.

Q. When do you think that was, approximately?

A. Approximately 6:00.

Q. And what was that -- the gist of that conversation?

A. It was a phone call that I had received from Oscar Martinez, the technician on site, who was working on an active

clearance. And he basically wanted to know what I could see on the monitor.

Q. And what was your response?

A. At that particular time, I was seeing some high pressures exiting that station that happened to look real to me from my experience on the job, and I transferred that information to him. And I related to him --

Q. Can you quantify what a "high pressure" is?

A. There's -- I was seeing 385 at that time. Sorry.

Q. And why is that a high pressure? What is normal?

A. The maximum operating pressure is 375.

Q. Okay. And so you had not been in communication with him all day?

A. I do not recall talking to him prior to that, no.

Q. Okay. All right. So that was approximately 6:00. And do you know about how long that conversation was?

A. Twenty seconds.

Q. Okay. And, I guess, could you describe what you were doing around that time? What were your -- what were you controlling?

A. We have three monitors and I usually have an alarm summary up. I did have the Milpitas screen up, because I knew there was an active clearance going on there. And I believe I also had the -- actually, I do not remember the third screen I had up at the time.

Q. Okay. I mean, normally, you're just doing your normal thing?

A. I'm doing my normal job, yes.

Q. Watching pressures. I understand that there's -- we understand that there's three forms of communication; telephone, a e-page and a gas logging system?

A. Yeah, you need to clarify communication from who to who, please.

Q. Just forms of communication in the control center.

A. Yeah. Inside the gas control center? So you're saying even leaving the center?

Q. Yeah. The center -- you know, you to your supervisor or whatever they call those guys, and then you to the field, and then --

A. Okay.

Q. They told me there's three. There's e-page, there's telephone and then there's this log.

A. Yeah, the gas logging system.

Q. And why would you use each of those, as opposed to a different?

A. The gas logging system is used for communication between us and the transmission coordinators.

Q. So that's internal --

A. That's internal. Phone calls and e-page would be external.

Q. So that's control center, two extra. Right?
A. Say that again?
Q. Control center, out to the field?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay.
A. I would like to clarify one thing.
Q. Um-hum.
A. The gas logging system is also used to communicate to a few districts in the system, where there are manned stations, like a compressor station that's manned. We can talk to them via GLS -- or gas logging system, also.
Q. Is it almost like an e-mail?
A. It's like the --
Q. I mean like texting?
A. It's like the old teletypes. Now, it's just -- yeah, you just type in on the computer and you're marking your targets, who you want to target and who you want to info.
Q. So you can add multiple people?
A. There's only -- there's only six or seven on there.
Q. Okay. Good. Thank you for that.
So, normally, when you would talk to Milpitas, normally you wouldn't use the gas logging system?
A. That's correct. They're not tied into that. That would be strictly phone calls.
Q. Okay. That makes a lot more sense.

MR. KATCHMAR: I'll let Sunil.

BY MR. SHORI:

Q. You said you received a call from Oscar --

A. Martinez.

Q. -- Martinez from Milpitas around 6:00?

A. I'm estimating. He asked for an estimate.

Q. That's fine. An estimate is fine.

And you said your -- based on the pressure you were seeing, you classified it as a high pressure?

A. Um-hum.

THE REPORTER: Was that a "yes"?

MR. VALENTI: Yes.

BY MR. SHORI:

Q. And did you -- who did you -- did you communicate that to anyone?

A. Strictly to Oscar.

Q. Okay. What about at the control center internally? Oscar's in Martinez, right?

A. No --

Q. Excuse me, Milpitas.

A. Oscar Martinez is in Milpitas, right.

Q. It's been a long day, I apologize.

He's in Milpitas?

A. Right.

Q. What about internally at the control center, to the

coordinator or anyone else, did you communicate that?

A. They were all doing their jobs the same time. They were all seeing it at the same time.

Q. Okay. And so you said, based on your experience, you saw that as high --

A. As high pressure.

Q. Okay. What was being done to address that? Or -- you got the one call to Milpitas. What was being done in the meantime to address that -- that high pressure? What were you doing in regard to that?

A. Well, his initial call was to ask me what I was seeing. They were working on a clearance, which was a UPS switchover clearance, where you normally don't see anything. We're kind of blind at that station. And it's not something we normally worry about, because we know the station is being manned by personnel.

So when he had called and said, "Hey, what do you see? Do you see anything?" I said, "Yeah, I see some high pressures leaving the station." And --

Q. Now, you said that's manned by personnel. Is that normally manned?

A. No, it was being manned because of the clearance.

Q. Because of the clearance.

And what's being done? So you conveyed to him that you see the high pressure. What's going on, starting at that point going forward in regard to that high pressure? You've told him

that it's high -- you see it as high, to Oscar.

What's going on -- or what are you -- what information is conveyed to you internally at the control center from management in regard to that situation? What are you doing about it? Or, what's your actions on that?

A. Confirming with him what I am seeing. Telling him what I am relaying to him, what I am seeing. And, again, not being overly concerned about it, because I knew the station was being manned and they were working on a clearance.

Q. But, by that point, what was the pressure that you were seeing?

A. 385.

Q. At somewhere, did you see that decrease? Did you watch it, just to see how long it's going to stay there or did they indicate to you that they were doing anything in regard to bringing it down?

First of all, would you have considered that an abnormal condition?

A. Not when the station is being manned and working on a clearance, no.

Q. It's t 385. What's your MOP on that line?

A. 375.

Q. But that it's at 385, as long as somebody is there, would be --

A. The type of clearance was a UPS clearance, which is

communication. What we saw, we had no idea if it was even real. It could have been zero. We don't --

Q. But if you were to compare that against other locations -- Martin, for example -- there was no work going on at Martin.

A. That's right.

Q. So any reading you were getting at Martin shouldn't be in question, right?

A. That's correct.

MR. FASSETT: Point of clarification: So is it accurate to say that you were less concerned because, although you were concerned about the SCADA, you knew they were working on it. Your means of communication was verbal with the mechanics, working to rectify the problem in Milpitas?

MR. VALENTI: That's -- the technicians. Correct.

BY MR. SHORI:

Q. So you -- you don't consider the 385 an abnormal condition at that stage, as long as you feel that there's a mechanic doing something on that end?

A. Not normally.

Q. So how long did you continue to watch it -- keep it at that pressure? So was there anything conveyed from the control to these folks to say, "We need to bring that pressure down," or that -- or anything in regard to that pressure?

A. Sure. Knowing that MOP is 375 and seeing it hover

around 385 for a period of time, I said to Oscar, I said -- he said, "What do you see?" I said, "I'm seeing 385." I said, "This looks real."

So I relayed that to him.

Q. And did you see that on other lines? Did you compare that against anything else to confirm?

A. Yeah, the outgoing stations leaving Milpitas were also showing 385. And that's why I said, "This looks real."

Q. At some point did you see that pressure decrease? I mean, did you watch it and what happened?

A. It was all over the place.

Q. In what way? What do you mean by that?

A. It had showed a false read of 600 briefly. It went to zero, briefly, and it went back to 385.

Q. Do you see that -- when you're watching the screen on other occasions on other lines, do you see the pressure change?

A. We get -- we get a lot of false reads. It's all done through communication, so the system is pulling the top of it to send us the signal, to keep us updated on pressures and flows throughout the system. A lot of times you'll see it spike and go right back to normal. It's called a SCADA glitch, is what we call it.

Q. But those are extremely momentary in nature, would you agree?

A. Yes, very momentary.

Q. So when something is prolonged, based on your experience and knowledge and training, you would see that as a real condition?

A. And that's why I relayed that. I said, "Hey, Oscar, this looks real."

Q. Okay. So as you watched this pressure stay at the 385 range, what did you do next? How long did it stay there at that particular range as you're watching it? How long did you watch it stay at that pressure?

A. I -- the phone call ended real quick. And it wasn't -- it wasn't very long after that, where I received another phone call from a different location.

Q. Okay. What -- did anybody indicate to you what they were going to be doing at Milpitas? When you talked to Oscar and you conveyed this information to him, what actions they were going to be taking in response to that, did they tell you?

A. You're referring to the clearance or what? From my reaction, what I said to Oscar when I said, "This looks real"?

Q. Right. So, I mean, they're at the station. And I'm not sure -- and maybe this is the next question as to whether the valves at that point, based on what you were seeing or what you knew, were they on automatic or were they on manual?

A. Again, with the type of clearance it was, we couldn't trust anything we were seeing. All of the valves in the whole yard showed closed. We didn't have any flows. We would have very

few pressures that would just show up every once in a while, because of the uninterruptible power supply clearance that was taking place. Communication was not there.

Q. So -- but, again, you know, what did they say when you told them, "I'm seeing 385," or, "I think it's real" -- what did they say to you that they were going to be doing or did they say anything?

A. I could hear Oscar -- while he was on the phone with me -- yelling to somebody else at the terminal, "Shut in those controllers."

Q. So did you see the pressure come down at some point from the 385?

A. That's -- that's where it was most of the time. I did see it zero out and come back, go up and come back.

Q. And why would it do it, depending on where you're monitoring? So you can pick the location that you want to see the pressure at, correct?

A. Not at that -- well, at that station, the whole diagram of that whole station is on our monitor, exactly how it's laid out on the ground or under the ground.

Q. Well, not necessarily that station. But if you wanted to get a pressure read on that line, you could get a pressure read --

A. You could go upstream or downstream and read the pressure.

Q. Right. So at this stage, had you confirmed the pressure at different points on that line to see that it is in this 385 range?

A. Yes, downstream I had looked. And that's why I said to him, "This looks real."

Q. Okay.

A. Otherwise, if I didn't see that pressure downstream, or staying in that spot for very long -- which I happen to know that's the monitor set -- the control set point is 385. Then I wouldn't even had thought that was real at any time.

Q. And so even excluding that -- the Milpitas readings are not reliable, if you're watching other readings, those are reliable. So if you're watching those, you state you saw those stay at those -- at that level?

A. Yes.

Q. So are they also flickering back and forth or were those generally staying firm?

A. Those were staying firm.

Q. Okay. So you watched it at that level, those readings at some time.

Then did you see it at anywhere start to come down from that level, from 385?

A. I don't remember.

Q. Who would be watching it? How many folks at any given time are doing that kind of work, to watch the screen for that?

So if you're not watching it, how many more people would be watching that line to see where it's at or to see -- why wouldn't you be watching it?

A. I think at that point I was looking at other screens, too, of the peninsula and other stations.

There's three operators who were on shift at the same time.

Q. And you're relatively close, right?

A. Yeah, just a few feet, side-by-side.

Q. Okay. So if you're not watching it and you've got to go on to some other lines or watching some other screen, is somebody else picking that up or doing anything on that particular line or that particular pressure reading?

And let me just clarify. Somebody's watching the screen. And so if you're going on to some other screen, some other line on the system, is somebody else watching this or doing anything on that end to continue following up, to see what can be done to bring that down? That you recall from your knowledge when you were there working?

A. The phone call had ended. We could not make any moves at any stations from Milpitas downstream. And knowing that that station was being manned at that time, you know, I think we were all looking at Milpitas and the peninsula. But as far as what we could really do at that point, I personally did not make any moves.

Q. Okay. And I need to get to the pressure coming down. So at some point did you -- were you informed by anyone about a rupture or the fact that -- notified of any event on any of the lines that you would be watching on the screen?

A. I -- not knowing the timeframe, I had received a call from the peninsula dispatcher -- his name was Sean -- asking us if we were aware of any crews working in the San Bruno area. And I told him that, no, we're not aware of any crews working in the San Bruno area.

Q. Did he indicate to you why he needed a crew -- did he indicate anything more on that end?

A. That there was something going on and he was dispatching crews to that area.

Q. And what time was that that you received that call?

A. I'd have to estimate again. 5:50, 6:00.

Q. Had you seen by that point the pressures come down on any of the peninsula lines or line 132, in particular? What did you -- I mean, when you heard that there's something going on in San Bruno, you -- do you know which line could be involved or do you know which line that this call may be in reference to?

A. No. Around the same time I received the peninsula call, I saw the pressure -- Morgan Station was on the other end. You have Milpitas, you have San Bruno, and then you have Martin.

Q. Right.

A. I saw the Martin Station pressure dropping rapidly.

Q. And what time is that?
A. All around the same time.
Q. Okay. What occurred after that -- after you saw the pressure drop, what did you communicate or what did you do? What were your actions?
A. Within a couple of minutes, through my experience, knowing something -- there's something going on -- I had notified -- placed a cell phone call to Chuck Martinez, who is the San Francisco foreman, leaving him a message on his cell phone that pressure is dropping rapidly at Martin Station, can you investigate? I told him the time. I said, "Here's my number. Call me."
Q. And what time did you make that call?
A. Around 6:00.
Q. Okay. Chuck Martinez --
A. Yes.
Q. -- is that the name?
A. Chuck Martinez.
Q. And what did Chuck indicate to you at that --
A. I did not talk to him. I left him a message on his cell phone.
Q. You left a message. Thank you.
Did you see the pressure dropping on any of the other lines at that point? Any of the other peninsula lines, other than 132?

A. I did. I was trending other stations and seeing pressure dropping, but nothing that was showing up on our alarm summary. Because Martin Station was dropping so fast.

Q. Okay. And so -- with the three lines, you're seeing a pressure decrease on all three lines coming to the peninsula is you're watching -- were you watching all three lines?

A. Well, there's four lines that I'm aware of that are around the peninsula. I know there's four lines leaving Milpitas, let's put it that way. No, I was not watching -- I was looking at the whole peninsula, in general.

Q. Okay. But do you -- is there -- do you know of any relation between 101, 109, and 132 in terms of pressure?

A. No, not -- no, I don't. I know that the maximum level operating pressure in 101 and 132 is 400 pounds, and it's 375 in 109.

Q. Can you repeat that?

A. The maximum allowable operating pressure in 101 and 132 is 400 pounds and it's 375 in line 109.

Q. Okay. So did you -- you saw the pressure drop on 132. And -- did you see the pressure drop on 132? I just want to clarify that.

A. I remember pressure dropping at Martin Station. I don't remember looking at the line.

Q. Okay. So with the pressure dropping at Martin is for 132 -- for line 132?

A. I don't know.

Q. And based on your pressure, did you -- based on your experience, did you see that -- let me back up a minute.

There's three lines coming in to Martin, am I correct? How many lines come into Martin?

A. I don't know offhand.

Q. So all you see is one pressure -- one line dropping, but nothing -- and you -- and you didn't gauge that against any other lines to see if there was anywhere else that you were seeing a -- well, let me restate. Let me restate.

You said you did see -- earlier you said you did see a decrease in the other lines and you saw a decrease in 132. Did you see a significant decrease in those other lines as you saw in 132?

A. No.

Q. What would that indicate to you, based on your experience?

A. Well, at that point, I really couldn't verify the line, still. I'm just kind of looking at stations and pressure trends. From my experience, I just knew that there was something that was going on in the San Bruno and it looked like a line break, the way the pressure was dropping.

Q. And did you communicate that to anybody? That based on what you were seeing and based on -- did you communicate that, that, "I believe that that's a line break"?

A. We were -- we were all talking out loud and looking at everything at the same time.

Q. But, again, you've got a pressure drop. You saw that, correct?

A. Um-hum.

MR. JAQUES: Yes?

MR. VALENTI: Yes.

BY MR. SHORI:

Q. Okay. And if you suspected it was a break -- or, again, I just want to get it clarified. I mean, there's a -- how significant of a pressure drop did you see? And you can quantify it, if you know it, but in terms of -- in terms of where that line normally is, what were you seeing it down to?

A. I know it went past the low alarm into low-low and settled out around 50 pounds. At this point, knowing that crews are in Milpitas, peninsula crews are being dispatched to an incident in San Bruno -- which we don't know what it was yet -- and me doing my job of notifying the San Francisco foreman that pressure is dropping at Martin, the peninsula was being covered by three different districts and divisions at this point, all going to their locations. And at that point, I -- there weren't any more outgoing phone calls. Everything was incoming from that point on.

Q. And which San Francisco foreman are you referring to notifying?

A. Chuck Martinez.

Q. And can we get a time on that, in terms of when you made that call?

A. I know it was two minutes after I received the call from the peninsula dispatch.

MR. FASSETT: Karl?

MR. GUNTHER: Oh, okay. Bob?

MR. FASSETT: Just a point of clarification. Chuck Martinez will be here tomorrow.

MR. SHORI: Then I won't ask him any questions about Chuck Martinez right now. Just one at a time.

MR. VALENTI: I did -- every phone call I received, there was a time line written down and turned in to my supervisor before I left that evening.

BY MR. SHORI:

Q. I apologize, it's really late in the day.

What did you say to Chuck Martinez when you talked to him? Oh, you left a message.

Did Chuck ever call you back?

A. No, he did not.

Q. Had you conveyed this information to the coordinator? And, again, it is the primary purpose of your job to give information to the coordinator in the center?

A. As I was gathering -- fielding phone calls from the field, anything that was vital to what I thought was going on, I

related to the senior transmission coordinator.

Q. Does that include -- again, you're the person watching the screen. You're the person seeing the pressure drop. Did you indicate anything about your suspicions of a line rupture?

A. I'm trying to remember for you.

Q. Sure. Take your time.

A. I just know that the room was getting excited. Something was happening, we were all fielding the same type of phone calls. We were all starting to talk out loud to each other, there's something going on. I did not indicate to anybody, "We have a line break at such-and-such." No, I did not.

Q. At what -- later on, at some point, did you hear -- did you get any confirmation that PG&E's facilities were involved in anything in San Bruno? When was the first time you heard about the line rupture? Let's say that.

A. Well, at this point people were watching the news on TV and the calls were coming in. Rumors were flying around the control room that it was an airplane had crashed into a transmission -- an electrical transmission line and hit a gas line.

And that rumor was in the room for a good half hour.

We knew -- we knew shortly that -- as we were pulling maps and diagrams and laying them out on the table that it was a line break. But when -- it wasn't confirmed until we got a call from the field engineer. I got a call from the field engineer.

Q. And who was that?
A. Drew Kelly.
Q. At what time did you get that call?
A. I don't know.
Q. And what did Drew tell you?
A. Drew had mentioned work crews were being dispatched to the various stations and that was the first of -- that was the first call I received from him.
Q. Okay.
MR. SHORI: I don't have any additional questions.
MR. GUNTHER: Ravi, do you have any questions?
MR. CHHATRE: Yes. Okay.
BY MR. CHHATRE:
Q. Okay. You mentioned that there was a clearance. What does that mean? What is expected of you? Did they expect a dinner clearance or some type of --
A. This was a system standard clearance, which is a clearance that we do have a copy of in our control room. And it was just an active clearance going on at this particular station by those district crews.
Q. But, I guess, what does that mean? I'm not sure what that tells you, or that you should or should not do.
A. All clearances vary. They're all very, very different. There's many types of clearances. Some have absolutely zero involvement from us operators and some have more.

In this particular clearance, there wasn't anything that we, as operators, would do to assist them on this clearance, other than, maybe, the call to verify a pressure read.

Q. So this is what you follow, a kind of document, a clearance request, or is -- I'm not -- if you're not supposed to do anything, why would they send a clearance to you? Is that for you to approve the clearance?

MR. FASSETT: Point of clarification. Is it accurate to say that sometimes there's a clearance to tell you someone will be working on the line, like the welding of a top tab, that doesn't affect the flow, but it's to notify you that someone is on the line and, therefore, it does not require your assistance from the changing of flows?

MR. VALENTI: That is correct. It's important for us to have that clearance, a copy of that, if we know that it's going to affect SCADA.

MR. FASSETT: And in addition to that, there are some clearances where, for example, a piece of pipe is being cut out and, therefore, a section will be isolated and a piece will be tied in and there will be men working on it and they will be drafting in a line that requires more assistance from you as an operator, is that correct?

MR. VALENTI: That is correct.

BY MR. CHHATRI:

Q. So, I think, following what Bob says, how would you know

what a clearance means? Is there a logbook that tells you what clearance means what?

A. Yeah, in a clearance -- most clearances, in general, will have a face sheet. It has a description of the clearance and what it entails. And then there's special instructions, if required, for us to do anything.

And just, to give you an example, sometimes special instructions -- they're going to do a blow-down, and we might need to make notifications to let people know that gas will be blowing in that area. So that would be our involvement on that particular clearance.

And then there's steps. Every clearance has steps.

Q. Okay. So you have some way of knowing --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- what your involvement should be or should not be. That's good. Okay.

So you said -- you gave a statement, I guess, you told that it exceeds psi -- or --

Besides this previous one, what makes you believe this is a real deal and not a glitch that comes?

A. From my experience. I know where the monitors were set, which is 10 pounds over MOP. And it seemed to be hovering around that pressure most of the time. And then I could also see that pressure outside of the station. And that's why it looked real to me.

Q. Okay.

A. And I relayed that back to Oscar.

Q. Did there be any allowance in your mind that they're working on an alternative power supply and -- it didn't allow another alarm on line?

MR. JAQUES: What do you mean by "alarm on this line"?

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. That this is a serious event. A serious event that needed intervention or action of some sort?

MR. JAQUES: I'm sorry, did it look serious or did it require his intervention? You're combining your questions.

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. Did it call for your intervention?

MR. JAQUES: Say it again?

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. Did you feel that it requires an intervention?

MR. JAQUES: His intervention.

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. His intervention, as an operator.

MR. JAQUES: I think that's been asked and answered. It has been asked and it has been answered.

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. And the answer is? I don't remember.

MR. JAQUES: It's reflected in the record.

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. Okay. All right.

Now, if the station is not manned, would you be concerned at 385?

A. Absolutely.

Q. Okay. And we were told earlier that a pressure drop of a few hundred psi on the line, the operators see frequently. Have you seen the pressure drop like that on any -- the same lines going to Milpitas? I mean 109, 101 and 132?

A. Have I ever seen the pressure drop --

Q. I'm going to narrow it down to the last couple of years. Have you seen a pressure drop like that?

A. No.

Q. And if we were to see a pressure of 385 at an unmanned station, what your actions would be?

A. It depends on what the MOP is. Some stations --

Q. Like 132, the same lines of MOP on 375.

A. I'm sorry, what's the question?

Q. The same lines which are running the radial from Milpitas to South San Francisco, if the station is unmanned -- like let's say it's Milpitas and it's unmanned --

A. Okay.

Q. -- and if the pressure is going at 385, you said you -- you would feel that it would require an intervention?

A. It would definitely require action, yes.

Q. And what actions you would take in a situation like

that?

A. An immediately phone call to the Milpitas supervisor.

Q. Okay.

A. Or, excuse me, it's the Milpitas/Hollister District Supervisor.

Q. Okay. Now, when the operator, his shift changes, what kind of -- what kind of a procedure is that you hand over the charge to your replacement?

A. When we're -- are you talking about being relieved or relieving somebody?

Q. Yes, both.

A. When I'm relieving somebody, coming on board for that shift, I basically ask them, "Okay. What do you have? What's going on?" And at that point, they would say, "Okay. We're controlling pressure here. We're spilling here. We're -- we're in the middle of an order here. Can you finish this order?" Some orders take -- they're time consuming to make.

They'll share with us the moves that they made during their 12-hour previous shift. Important moves. Certain compressors that have been turned on or turned off.

Q. So you've got highlights of the shift?

A. Yeah, the highlights of the shift.

Q. And if you are relieving somebody, what will you do?

A. Yeah, pretty much the same thing. I always give them the highlights of the shift, let them know of anything that's

active, that they need to look at, continue to operate, until we've met the order.

Q. And typically how long it takes to do that shift change?

A. I would say on the average, 10 minutes.

Q. And what about the typical shift hours for you?

A. 5:30 to 5:30.

Q. Okay.

A. Rotating swing shifts, I go from days to nights, constantly.

Q. Okay. Any kind of schedule that you have to have a certain amount of rest between those two change morning from evening shifts?

A. Yeah. It depends on how far we have to commute. But we never really work more than four shifts in a row, unless there's some overtime involved. When you're working between day shifts and night shifts -- what I think you were getting at -- yeah. Our breaks can range anywhere from two days to seven days.

MR. CHHATRE: I think that's all for me. Thank you very much. It does help me.

MR. VALENTI: Thank you.

MR. GUNTHER: Okay. Sunil?

MS. MAZZANTI: I just have one question.

BY MS. MAZZANTI:

Q. Ravi asked you about -- if you actually notified somebody, "I think it's a break." And you said, "We were all

talking."

The -- what does the room look like? I mean, if there was -- is the coordinator in very close proximity with the way the room is set up, so as conversations go on, the folks are being --

A. Yeah, we're all within earshot of each other. We can communicate to each other by talking across the room.

Q. Okay. So if you had made the statement, there are other folks who are in control, who are in authority, who can hear those conversations or part of that conversation, would that be safe to say?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay.

MR. SHORI: Just one follow-up.

BY MR. SHORI:

Q. In kind of like a similar question, why was that discussion going on in regard to whether -- you said they were watching the news, watching this thing on TV?

A. Not us in the control room.

Q. Who was watching?

A. I guess everybody who wasn't in that control room.

Q. And how did you know -- if you weren't watching, how do you know that they're watching?

A. Because the phone calls that we were fielding say, "Yeah, I see this on the news. What's going on?"

Q. And you said -- but there's within the room, there

was -- was there, perhaps, discussion or thought as to whether it's gas or a plane?

A. We never assume it's a line break and -- until it's confirmed and verified by folks in the field. And we -- we just can't assume because the pressure is dropping that the line has been ruptured.

Q. Let me first and then we'll do the clarification.

Why -- what else would cause the pressure drop? Had you seen any valves -- there's no automatic valves on that. So what else would cause that pressure drop? Even though there's a suspicion as to a line break or not, what else would you, based on your experience, would determine that is causing that pressure drop, which you have said was -- you suspected was real? Did you have any question about the validity of the data that you were seeing at that stage?

A. When I said, "This looks real," I was referring to Milpitas -- a phone call with Oscar.

Q. Okay.

A. Earlier.

Q. Okay. But, backing up, at this stage --

MR. FASSETT: I'm sorry, he's already on follow-up. I haven't even been able to give my first questions. May I ask the first questions and then he can ask his finish his follow-up?

MR. GUNTHER: Okay. Go ahead.

MR. FASSETT: Thank you.

BY MR. FASSETT:

Q. So, this was brought up in a previous discussion, as Ravi said, previously we've had other discussions around pressure. Is it accurate to say that there is no meter measurement flow calculations, you have no idea of how much flow in this pipeline is going on because there is no meter downstream of Milpitas? Is that correct? On line 132.

A. I don't know.

Q. Is it correct to say that the classic definition of a line rupture is an increase in flow and a reduction in pressure?

A. That's correct.

Q. And absent measurement, absent flow, all you have is you knew that there was a reduction in pressure, is that correct?

A. That's correct.

Q. And if there's only reduction in pressure, you have to ask other questions, like the operation of the equipment, is that correct?

A. That's correct.

Q. Thank you.

MR. CHHATRE: Let me follow-up on that one.

MR. GUNTHER: Well, no. Go and let Sunil finish.

BY MR. SHORI:

Q. If my recollection is correct, you did say that your monitoring -- that is why I asked that.

MR. FASSETT: As stated in previous conversation, there

is no flow measurement downstream --

MR. CHHATRE: I understand that.

MR. FASSETT: -- of Milpitas on line 132.

MR. CHHATRE: If it does say flow, you -- because otherwise you have two different doing two different things. I'm not saying -- you know, maybe it's a slip of tongue or whatever -- but we need to correct that, so be mindful of that.

BY MR. SHORI:

Q. Flow measurement -- absent the flow measurement, did you -- were any changes made to any of the valving that would have impacted the flow that existed before you saw the pressure?

MR. JAQUES: You mean changes by hand to the valving?

BY MR. SHORI:

Q. Changes to the valving at Martin or anywhere else downstream that would have affected the flow from that line? Were there any changes made?

A. I did not make any changes.

Q. So not having made any changes to the valve positioning and seeing the pressure drop, what would you take that as? Based on your experience, what would you see that as?

MR. JAQUES: You mean assuming nothing else caused a change in the position of the valves? You're presenting it with an incomplete hypothetical question, which is not appropriate. You're trying to use him as an expert witness, which is not appropriate.

If you have a factual question for him, you can ask it. If you're trying to get him to be an expert witness here to serve your purposes, it's highly inappropriate.

If you have a question about something that he saw or something that he did or something that he heard, ask it. Otherwise, stop what you're doing.

MR. SHORI: I didn't characterize it as that. And all I asked was, since he's the controller, since he has control ability, did he make any changes to the controls -- to the valves that would have changed the flow.

MR. JAQUES: You're assuming he's the only one who could make changes to a valve and that something else couldn't have caused a change in the position. You're presenting an incomplete and, frankly, unfair hypothetical of this witness.

MR. SHORI: I characterized -- I started the way, "Did you change any flow? Did you change any valves?" I didn't say he's the only one who could do it. I asked did he do it.

MR. JAQUES: In that case, your question is meaningless and misleading, because you're not taking into account other possible facts in a hypothetical situation. It's not a fair question and he's not going to answer it.

MR. SHORI: We'll stop there. Thank you.

MR. JAQUES: I have a follow-up.

BY MR. JAQUES:

Q. When you saw that the pressure at Martin Station was

dropping through low-low to 50 psi, were the other gas controllers and coordinators aware of that, as well? Was that information equally available to the others?

A. Yes, it was equally available to the others.

MR. JAQUES: That's all I have.

MR. CHHATRE: I need to follow that.

How do you know if they would or not -- that information may be available? Do you know one way or the other -- or how do you know that they are following it or not following it?

MR. VALENTI: I can't speak for what they actually saw did occur.

MR. CHHATRE: Thank you.

MR. GUNTHER: All right. Any --

MR. KATCHMAR: I've got a couple.

BY MR. KATCHMAR:

Q. Are cell phone calls logged or recorded in any way?

A. We don't make outgoing calls from cell phones. The calls that are outgoing are made from the company phone and they are all recorded, whether we're calling a cell phone or a house phone.

Q. Okay. I just want to clarify, you mentioned that you called -- you said you place a cell phone call to Chuck Martinez and left him a message.

A. That is correct. I'm calling from my company phone, calling his cell phone.

Q. Oh. Is your company phone a cell phone?

A. No.

Q. Oh, you said you placed a cell phone call. I thought it was your -- okay. I thought it was your cell phone.

So that call is recorded?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Okay. Thank you, that clarifies that. To his cell phone, okay.

Do you generally make -- do you generally see a lot of pressure excursions on these lines, the 101, 132?

MR. JAQUES: You'd better define. Maybe ask him whether or not he has seen them before and then ask him for details, if he recalls.

MR. KATCHMAR: Okay.

BY MR. KATCHMAR:

Q. Have you seen pressure exclusions on line 132?

A. No.

Q. Okay. Then that's asked and answered.

Question: They gave us one of these -- what do they call this thing, GLS -- gas logging system. And earlier in the day, 1630, it appears that you're writing this. It says, "Just received a call from Doug, Concord dispatch, informing us about a house fire in San Ramon, caused by a gas meter explosion. GSR en route, more to come."

And I guess my question is, if you did that there, why

wouldn't you have done it for the 6:00 stuff?

A. When the phone calls started coming in with the incident that was being taking place, as soon as you hung up, the phone was ringing again. And as soon as you hung up that one, the phone was ringing again.

So I was too busy writing in times. I didn't have time to start typing messages in the GLS, I was too busy taking notes or answering a phone call.

Q. Good answer. Thank you. That's it.

MR. CHHATRE: I need to follow-up on that one.

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. Aren't there three operators looking at the same screen, within the earshot of the conversation?

A. No --

Q. Are there not -- I'm sorry, what did you say?

MR. JAQUES: He said, "No."

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. I thought there was another question before that being the size of the room, could everybody else could hear what he was talking about and the answer to that was "yes."

A. No, you said "same screens." We have hundreds of screens that anybody could look at.

Q. But in your conversation, could your neighboring operators hear with those calls going on?

MR. JAQUES: I'm sorry, I just couldn't understand that

question.

MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. He said he was too busy answering phone calls after phone calls after that house fire.

A. No.

MR. JAQUES: No, that's not what he said.

MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Then I have to understand what you said.

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. Which way -- okay. Whatever the time period, could the other operators hear you on the phone? That you were trying to answer these prior calls?

A. Are you referring to the San Ramon incident?

Q. Right.

A. Earlier in the day?

Q. I think the San Ramon incident happened at night.

A. Whether they're listening in on my conversations or not, I can't speculate.

Q. Referring to the same situation when you have the people within earshot, you cannot say whether they are listening to you or not?

A. That's correct.

Q. Is that true?

A. That is correct, sir.

MR. CHHATRE: Thanks.

MR. GUNTHER: Okay. Is there anything that we should know that you haven't told us?

MR. VALENTI: No.

MR. GUNTHER: Does anybody have any more questions?

Okay. Finally, is there any statement that you would like to make for the record?

MR. VALENTI: No.

MR. GUNTHER: All right. Thank you for your cooperation and your time, and you -- you know, and your commitment to public safety.

MR. VALENTI: Thank you, Mr. Gunther.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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 Michael Valenti
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.

[redacted]
Robert Friant
Official Reporter

10/10/10 [redacted]