

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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THE EXPLOSION OF APARTMENT
BUILDING 8701 OF FLOWER BRANCH
APARTMENTS IN SILVER SPRING,
MARYLAND ON AUGUST 10, 2016

Accident No.: DCA16FP003

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Interview of: JAMES LITTLE, JR.

Washington Gas Facilities
Chillum, Maryland

Friday
August 19, 2016

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: RAVI CHHATRE
Investigator-in-Charge

APPEARANCES:

RAVI CHHATRE, Investigator-in-Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

RACHAEL GUNARATNAM, Hazmat Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board
Tel: [REDACTED]

KALU KELLY EMEABA, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board
Tel: [REDACTED]

RASHMIKANT AMROLIWALA, Pipeline Safety Engineer
Public Service Commission
Tel: [REDACTED]

LT. WILLIAM OLIN, Fire and Explosives Investigator
Montgomery County, Maryland
Tel: [REDACTED].
[REDACTED].

DOUGLAS STAEBLER, Senior Vice President Operations
Washington Gas
Tel: [REDACTED]

STEVE PRICE, Division Head of Systems Operations
Washington Gas
Tel: [REDACTED].
[REDACTED].

SPENCER NICHOLS, Associate General Counsel
Washington Gas
Tel: [REDACTED]

I N D E X

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I N T E R V I E W

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2 MR. CHHATRE: Good afternoon. Today is Friday,
3 August 19, 2016. We are currently in Chillum, Maryland, at
4 Washington Gas, Chillum Station, and we are meeting in regards to
5 the investigation of explosion in Building 8701, Arliss Street,
6 Flower Branch Apartments, Silver Spring, Maryland. The accident
7 occurred on August 10, 2016. The NTSB investigation number for
8 this accident is DCA16FP003.

9 My name is Ravi Chhatre. I am with the National
10 Transportation Safety Board located in Washington, D.C., and I am
11 Investigator-in-Charge of this accident.

12 I would like to start by notifying everyone present in this
13 room that we are recording this interview for transcription at a
14 later date. All parties will have a chance to review the
15 transcripts if and when they are completed.

16 Also, I would like to inform Mr. James Little that you are
17 permitted to have one other person present with you during the
18 interview. This is a person of your choice: your supervisor,
19 your friend, family member or, if you choose, no one at all. It's
20 your call.

21 Please state for the record your full name, spelling of your
22 name, contact information such as work phone, work email address
23 or work postal address, and whom you have chosen to be present
24 with you during your interview.

25 MR. LITTLE: James Little, Jr., J-a-m-e-s, L-i-t-t-l-e,

1 Junior. My work office number is [REDACTED]. My email address
2 is [REDACTED]. And I choose Spencer Nichols to be
3 here.

4 MR. CHHATRE: Now I'd like to go around the room and have
5 each person introduce themselves. Please state your name,
6 spelling of your name, your title, and the organization that you
7 represent, and your contact information such as work phone, email
8 address and mailing address. Starting from my left.

9 MR. EMEABA: Kalu Kelly Emeaba, K-a-l-u, K-e-l-l-y,
10 E-m-e-a-b-a. I'm an NTSB investigator. My phone number is [REDACTED]-
11 [REDACTED].

12 MR. AMROLIWALA: My name is Rashmikan Amroliwala.
13 The first name is R-a-s-h-m-i-k-a-n-t, and last name is
14 A-m-r-o-l-i-w-a-l-a. I work with the State of Maryland, Public
15 Service Commission, Pipeline Safety Engineer. My phone number is
16 [REDACTED].

17 MR. STAEBLER: My name is Douglas Staebler. I'm the Senior
18 Vice President of Operations for Washington Gas. Staebler is
19 spelled S-t-a-e-b-l-e-r. My phone number is [REDACTED].

20 MR. PRICE: My name is Steve Price. I'm the Division Head of
21 System Operations, Washington Gas. My cell phone number is [REDACTED]-
22 [REDACTED]; email [REDACTED].

23 MR. NICHOLS: Spencer Nichols, Associate General Counsel,
24 Washington Gas, [REDACTED].

25 MS. GUNARATNAM: Rachael Gunaratnam, hazmat investigator,

1 NTSB. My number is [REDACTED].

2 MR. CHHATRE: Thank you.

3 INTERVIEW OF JAMES LITTLE, JR.

4 BY MR. CHHATRE:

5 Q. Mr. Little, just tell us something about you, your
6 background, your formal education, experience, how long you have
7 been with Washington Gas. If you've had any other previous
8 related experience, tell us that. You can go on from there.

9 A. Okay. Twenty-two years retired from the Army Reserves. Been
10 working for Washington Gas for 31 years. I'm a supervisor in leak
11 survey.

12 Q. I'm sorry. How many years you said you're at Washington Gas?

13 A. Thirty-one.

14 Q. Thirty-one. Okay. So when this incident happened were you a
15 supervisor or you were a technician?

16 A. Supervisor.

17 Q. So as the supervisor, what are your duties?

18 A. I'm supervisor of a leak survey, which we test -- we leak
19 survey, test for leaks in the ground. We do transmission surveys.
20 We do route meter surveys. We do 5-hour surveys. We do bridge
21 surveys.

22 Q. All that is in your jurisdiction?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Okay. Now this document that we are looking at is -- I think
25 at that time you are gas service technician?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Prior to this. So let's walk through, go back years and tell
3 me if you recall any of these incidents that's documented in here.
4 Do you remember going to the building, doing anything at all?

5 A. No. No, not at all.

6 Q. You don't remember anything?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Do you want to go through the document and see if it
9 refreshes your memory or -- and if you don't, you don't. I
10 mean --

11 A. Um-hum. Yeah. I mean, I've looked through the document, and
12 I don't recall going to this building. I do recall going there to
13 turn gas on or turn gas off at certain points or another. But as
14 far as this particular incident, I don't recall.

15 Q. Well, I guess if you don't recall, there's not a whole lot we
16 can ask you on this one. Have you gone to any other locations
17 where there's leak, internal leak?

18 A. Oh, yes.

19 Q. Okay. And anything in that complex, apartment complex?

20 A. In that complex?

21 Q. Right.

22 A. No, I don't recall. I -- you know, this has been, this has
23 been 4 or 5 years ago and I --

24 Q. Yes, I understand.

25 A. I couldn't remember.

1 Q. Okay. That's fine.

2 A. I'd go -- I go to so many houses, you know, when I was a
3 tech, you know --

4 Q. I understand.

5 A. -- out there for 30 some years and --

6 Q. Yeah, I understand.

7 A. -- you know, trying to bring back something, you know, that
8 I've done, I don't know.

9 MR. CHHATRE: That's fine. I guess I don't have any
10 questions in that case.

11 Do you have any questions?

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I don't have any questions.

13 MR. AMROLIWALA: Yeah. I have one question over here.

14 BY MR. AMROLIWALA:

15 Q. I just reviewed this report, and here you said that the
16 repaired gas line on meter outlet, so you have re-light and
17 appliances left. Okay. There is no -- the meter which you just
18 repaired for the -- where there was a problem, what meter, what
19 apartment number meter was repaired? How are we to know that
20 which meter was repaired? In the last page of your report.

21 A. Yeah. I'm looking at this.

22 Q. Is there any -- the location of the meter?

23 A. Yeah. I didn't -- no, I did note note what -- which meter it
24 was. I just noted that I repaired a leak there.

25 Q. But normally it's a requirement that when you go out and

1 whatever the meter you repair, you need to write it down, the
2 meter number and apartment number, some more details, so that they
3 know. Because there are 15 meters in that particular building.

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. And which meter you repair, then no one knows. So that's
6 what I was looking.

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Yeah.

9 A. Yes. I mean, it could have been the house meter. I'm not
10 sure. You're right. I should have put down the meter number to
11 where, you know --

12 Q. Yeah.

13 A. -- where I repaired the leak at.

14 Q. And on the leak, you don't remember for this particular
15 thing, but -- so this is like a bank of meters, 15 meters. Once
16 you fix the -- this was a complaint like the gas leak inside the
17 basement or near the meter rack that was --

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. So you found the leak on the meter. Did you -- how did you
20 find -- or maybe when you just went inside the building at the
21 same time or maybe next -- you might be going now, how you go
22 inside the building? Do you keep your Gas-Trac or the CGI on and
23 get into the building or --

24 A. Yes, yes. I have to turn it on outside in the free air, and
25 then I take it inside and check, you know, check everything.

1 Q. And here you say that you just re-lighted the appliances.
2 Why did you re-light?

3 A. At this particular point, if it was the water heater --
4 because the water heater normally have its own meter. If it's the
5 water heater, then I'll just light the water heater. If it's just
6 the stove, then I'll go light the stove.

7 Q. Okay. So before -- did you tested the line, the house line?
8 Or maybe any case, if you get this kind of complaint, do you test
9 the house line?

10 A. If you -- yeah. You have to -- if you turn the gas off, you
11 have to check the gas, the house line before you can reintroduce
12 gas back in.

13 Q. Okay. The second thing. When you see the bank of meters, is
14 it a requirement that you need to check all the meters with the
15 Gas-Trac or just --

16 A. And I'm -- yes. And I'm sure I did.

17 Q. Okay. So --

18 A. And that's where I found the leak at.

19 Q. -- that's the procedure that it needs to be checked?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. And do you have an OQ qualification for 1203 and 1202 that's
22 a gas leak detection inside of the building and gas leak detection
23 outside the building. Do you have OQ qualifications, current
24 ones?

25 A. I think so. I normally keep my OQ card with me. 1201.

1 Q. Um-hum. What's the date?

2 A. 4/10/17.

3 Q. 4/10/17, that's the 1201. And 1202?

4 A. Was 4/11/15.

5 Q. You said 4/11/15?

6 A. Um-hum.

7 Q. So is already expired.

8 A. Yeah, but I'm a supervisor now. I'm not -- I don't have to
9 have that qualification.

10 Q. So that qualification is leak detection outside the building?

11 A. Yeah. But back on 2011, I was in compliance with that at the
12 time.

13 Q. Okay, so being a supervisor you don't need the qualification
14 for; is that correct?

15 A. That's correct.

16 MR. AMROLIWALA: Okay.

17 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

18 Q. Just a couple questions. The couple times you indicated that
19 you might have been out there on a turn-on and some other time,
20 did you ever have any interaction with the building management
21 staff that you recall out there? Does anything stand out?

22 A. Normally I think out there, I want to say, I went to the
23 maintenance office or -- you know, normally I go to maintenance
24 office to get the keys to get in the meter room, if I have a
25 turn-on or a turn-off at one of the other buildings. But for

1 something like this -- I think the rental office was in this
2 building, so I went right to the rental office and told them what
3 I was there for and they showed me where I need to go at to check.

4 Q. Okay. Other than needing them to give you access to the
5 meter room, in the account remark on this particular CAD document,
6 do you have this information when you arrive?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. And so that's on your CAD screen?

9 A. That's on the CAD screen. It should be. Yeah. Yeah.
10 Matter of fact, it should have told me -- normally it tells you to
11 go to the rental office, you know, and told me what apartment that
12 was.

13 Q. And --

14 A. And it will tell me where they're smelling the gas at.

15 Q. And so you're pointing to the information both in what we've
16 seen as account INST and account remark or RMK?

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. That's the information given to you as a technician?

19 A. On the CAD, yes.

20 Q. On the CAD screen.

21 A. Um-hum.

22 Q. And that information on this document says odor in storage
23 room.

24 A. Um-hum.

25 Q. At meter.

1 A. At meter. So that tells me that it's in the meter room is
2 where it's at. But if it tells me to go to the office, the rental
3 office, that's the first thing I do when I get there.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Go to the rental office and let them know I'm there, and then
6 they'll direct me --

7 Q. Right.

8 A. -- to the meter room.

9 Q. But it calls it a storage room, and it's obviously a meter
10 room.

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Do you recall there being anything stored --

13 A. No, I --

14 Q. -- in there?

15 A. -- don't, I can't remember that.

16 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay. I don't have anything further.

17 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Rachael.

18 BY MS. GUNARATNAM:

19 Q. Have you ever done any type of work on a regulator or the
20 pipes around a regulator?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. What kind of work was that?

23 A. I've replaced regulators. I've checked regulators.

24 Q. Have you ever seen like a failed regulator?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. How did it fail? Like what did it look like?

2 A. Well, it failed because it's not holding, you know, it's not
3 holding the lockup so it's allowing gas to come -- go through. So
4 in that case you have to change out that regulator.

5 Q. Do you see that frequently?

6 A. Not a whole lot.

7 Q. Was it a mercury regulator that failed?

8 A. From what I've stated here, yes, it was a mercury regulator.

9 Q. Okay. Was that here in -- was there a failed regulator in
10 this incident?

11 A. No, no.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. No.

14 Q. Okay. So I had a separate question about you mentioned that
15 you knew R.K. before. Do you as a supervisor or a technician, do
16 you interact with Maryland Public Service Commission?

17 A. Most definitely as a supervisor.

18 Q. As a supervisor.

19 A. And I've been out with them as a tech before.

20 Q. Okay. So can you describe those interactions? Like what are
21 you doing with your relationship with the Public Service
22 Commission?

23 A. Well, as a supervisor, he may need to go with one of my
24 direct reports as they go out and do surveys. So he can go and,
25 you know, check, test behind them, you know, what they do. And as

1 a tech, you know, he might come out and walk with me, you know, on
2 a particular job or couple of jobs, you know, just to see how I
3 did my procedures.

4 Q. Okay. Is it a requirement for you to call them when you're
5 doing your surveys?

6 A. No. They call me. They --

7 Q. Oh, they call -- okay, okay.

8 A. Yeah, they call me and say they want to, they want to go out
9 with someone. And then we'll coordinate that schedule, you know,
10 when --

11 Q. Oh, okay.

12 A. -- he can go out with us.

13 Q. I see.

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. How often -- is there like a time period he has -- is it like
16 every 6 months or something or every year?

17 A. No. Maybe once a year, maybe twice a year, you know.

18 Q. Okay. But there's no required --

19 A. No.

20 Q. Okay, that's the extent -- do you have to submit any
21 paperwork to them, Maryland Public Service Commission?

22 A. No.

23 Q. No. Okay.

24 A. Normally when Maryland Public Service Commission is going out
25 with one of my direct reports, there's an auditor from the gas

1 company that's there with them. So he's the one that fills out
2 the report.

3 MR. CHHATRE: I have no follow-up questions? Do you have any
4 follow-up questions?

5 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No, I don't. Thank you.

6 MR. CHHATRE: Do you?

7 If not, off the record. Thank you for coming.

8 MR. LITTLE: Thank you.

9 (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: THE EXPLOSION OF APARTMENT
BUILDING 8701 OF FLOWER BRANCH
APARTMENTS IN SILVER SPRING,
MARYLAND ON AUGUST 10, 2016
Interview of James Little, Jr.

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA16FP003

PLACE: Chillum, Maryland

DATE: August 19, 2016

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

Katherine Motley
Transcriber