

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: ROMEL PANLAQUI

Pine Ridge Apartments
8617 Piney Branch Road
Silver Spring, Maryland

Saturday,
August 27, 2016

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: RAVI CHHATRE
Investigator-in-Charge

APPEARANCES:

RAVINDRA 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
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Washington Gas
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State of Maryland Public Service Commission
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I N D E X

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Romel Panlaqui:	
By Mr. Chhatre	5
By Ms. Gunaratnam	11
By Mr. Price	13
By Mr. Olin	14
By Mr. Emeaba	15

I N T E R V I E W

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2 MR. CHHATRE: Good afternoon. Today is Saturday,
3 August 27, 2016. We are currently at Pine Ridge Apartments
4 located at 8617 Piney Branch Road, Silver Spring, Maryland. We
5 are meeting regarding the investigation of explosion of Building
6 8701, Flower Branch Apartments, Silver Spring, Maryland, that
7 occurred on August 10, 2016.

8 My name is Ravi Chhatre. I am with the National
9 Transportation Safety Board located in Washington, D.C., and I am
10 Investigator-in-Charge of this accident. The NTSB investigation
11 number for this accident is DCA16FP003.

12 I would like to start by notifying everyone present in this
13 room that we are recording this interview, and we may transcribe
14 it at a later date. Transcripts will be provided directly to the
15 interviewee for review and identifying any typographical errors.
16 The transcripts may be posted in NTSB's public docket.

17 Also, I would like to inform Mr. Romel Panlaqui --

18 MR. PANLAQUI: Yes.

19 MR. CHHATRE: -- that you are permitted to have one other
20 person present with you during the interview. This is a person of
21 your choice: your supervisor, friend, family member or, if you
22 choose, no one at all.

23 Please state for the record your full name, spelling of your
24 name, organization you work for and your title, business contact
25 information such as mailing address, and whom you have chosen to

1 be present with you during the interview.

2 MR. PANLAQUI: My name is Romel, R-o-m-e-l. My last name is
3 Panlaqui, P-a-n-l-a-q-u-i. And I live in [REDACTED] --

4 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Don't give him your home address.

5 MR. PANLAQUI: Oh. I'm sorry.

6 MR. CHHATRE: Okay, that's okay, we'll redact it. We'll
7 redact it.

8 INTERVIEW OF ROMEL PANLAQUI

9 BY MR. CHHATRE:

10 Q. Your --

11 A. My position right now is maintenance. I've been working here
12 3 months. I just got transferred.

13 Q. Okay. You are working as maintenance technician?

14 A. Uh-huh.

15 Q. Okay. And that is with? Who do you work for?

16 A. My manager was --

17 Q. No, the company.

18 A. Kay Management.

19 Q. Kay Management. Okay. And how long you have been at this
20 location?

21 A. Three months.

22 Q. Three months.

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. And before that were you still working for Kay?

25 A. Yeah. At London Park in Virginia.

1 Q. Okay. And how long you were there?

2 A. Three years.

3 Q. Three years.

4 A. Yeah. I worked over there as a cleaner.

5 A. As a cleaner there. Okay. So 3 years cleaner in Virginia,
6 okay, and now 3 months as a --

7 A. Maintenance.

8 Q. -- maintenance technician.

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Okay. Tell me any education you have, any training that you
11 have for this job?

12 A. We got a training in Kay Management like plumbing,
13 electrician, like, you know, like regular.

14 Q. Okay. Any formal education?

15 A. What do you mean?

16 Q. Any education, high school, college?

17 A. Oh, I was -- I went to college in Philippines.

18 Q. Philippines.

19 A. Three years.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. Business management.

22 Q. Okay.

23 MR. EMEABA: Philippines?

24 MR. PANLAQUI: Yep.

25 BY MR. CHHATRE:

1 Q. Okay. And the training that Kay gave you, how long was that
2 training?

3 A. I can't remember. It was like 2005. 2005.

4 Q. Right. But I mean like a month, week, day?

5 A. It's a day.

6 Q. One day?

7 A. Yeah. Plumbing one day. Teach you how to sweat the pipe,
8 you know, in case of problems.

9 Q. Okay. And electrician?

10 A. I learned from experience.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. Yeah. And, you know, when I don't know, I ask my friend
13 Rafael, because he know electrician.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. So when I need, I'll just call him. When I don't know what
16 I'm doing, I just call.

17 Q. Rafael. Okay. So tell me what typical duties you do here as
18 a maintenance technician?

19 A. Mainly I do right here in the fall was like mostly with a
20 clogged tub and a sink.

21 Q. Sink?

22 A. Tub.

23 Q. Tub, okay, bathtub?

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. Okay. Anything else?

1 A. Blinds, things like that.

2 Q. Okay. Do you do any work on the water heaters or --

3 A. No.

4 Q. -- air conditioning units?

5 A. No.

6 Q. Anything with the kitchen stove, furnace?

7 A. Uh-uh.

8 Q. Nothing?

9 A. Nothing.

10 Q. Have you been in the basement of 8701 prior to the accident
11 for any reason?

12 A. I was in the shop. Like, you know, that's our shop. Like
13 when we need something, we take parts over there and then we
14 leave.

15 Q. Okay. And that will be in the basement where the meters and
16 water heater is?

17 A. No. It's right here.

18 Q. Right next to it?

19 A. Um-hum.

20 Q. So there is a door between the shop --

21 A. And a door between the --

22 Q. -- and the -- okay. And that door is closed?

23 A. Uh-huh.

24 Q. So you never went --

25 A. On that day?

1 Q. -- into 8701 the meter room or storage room?

2 A. Oh, sometimes I need supply. Because we got like, you know,
3 like cleaning supply over there.

4 Q. Right.

5 A. Rags.

6 Q. But not on the day of the accident?

7 A. Uh-uh.

8 Q. You did not. Any time you went into the 8701 meter room or
9 storage room, did you smell any gas odor?

10 A. No.

11 Q. Do you remember that room, how that room looked like?

12 A. Um-hum.

13 Q. Does the room have any windows?

14 A. Two windows on the other side where the meter at. Supply
15 right here. Supply right here. Some (indiscernible) for the AC.
16 Yeah.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. That's all. Because I don't go too far.

19 Q. Okay. You don't go to the water heater or gas meters? Okay.

20 A. Uh-uh. Because when I go over there, I go straight to the
21 supplies.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. Sometimes I need Spray Nine or rag.

24 Q. And are the windows covered by the shelf or they are kind on
25 the top?

1 A. They're on the top like --

2 Q. So they are not blocked?

3 A. Uh-uh. They got a hole.

4 Q. There are holes. Both window have holes or only one window
5 has holes?

6 A. I think one window. I really don't pay attention about it,
7 but I --

8 Q. I understand.

9 A. -- see some holes over there, yeah.

10 Q. But at least one window have holes for sure?

11 A. Um-hum.

12 Q. Okay. Now when you ever go in there do you feel like I
13 cannot breathe easily or I'm going to pass out?

14 A. No.

15 Q. Usually how long, how much time you spend in the basement?

16 A. Probably 2 minutes just to get the supply.

17 Q. Okay, not too long?

18 A. Not too long, you know.

19 Q. All right.

20 A. I don't spend a lot of time.

21 Q. Okay. And you are here only 3 months, right, but I'll just
22 ask you anyway. Do you know a gentleman named Melty Castillo?
23 Have you heard about him?

24 A. No.

25 Q. You haven't heard about him? Okay. What about

1 Mr. Diaz, I guess.

2 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: It's Walter.

3 MR. EMEABA: Walter Diaz.

4 BY MR. CHHATRE:

5 Q. Walter Diaz?

6 A. No.

7 Q. No. Okay. Has anyone ever asked you to give or borrow your
8 key from you?

9 A. No.

10 Q. No. You haven't given your key to anybody?

11 A. No, nobody.

12 MR. CHHATRE: Okay, and that's all I have. Thank you so
13 much.

14 Rachael.

15 BY MS. GUNARATNAM:

16 Q. Do you -- did you, when you got training, did you ever get
17 training on the gas detector?

18 A. They show us how to us it, yes.

19 Q. And did you ever have to respond these last 3 months to any
20 gas odor calls from the residents?

21 A. I got one response because they sand the floor in 66 floor,
22 so they call about it. It was 9:30 in the night. That was like a
23 month I start right here. And then they sand the floor in 201.
24 But when the office call about the gas leak, so we respond quick,
25 you know. We go over there with a gas detector, go to the

1 apartment, make sure don't have a -- you know, the one they talk
2 about. Then knock couple of doors, and then I open the door where
3 they sand the floor and I let them in. It's this the smell that
4 you -- you know, something like that, but no, no leak at all.

5 Q. Okay. That's the only one?

6 A. Um-hum.

7 Q. Okay. Have you ever had to let Washington Gas into 8701?

8 A. Mainly they always go to the office because we're busy
9 running tickets. So I don't know what's going on in the office,
10 so I never see somebody.

11 Q. So that week of the accident was -- did you go in -- you
12 didn't go into -- did you go into 8701 at all?

13 A. No. I always stay right there by the shop.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Because they got two doors: this one from the meter room and
16 this one for the shop. So I always stay in the shop because
17 everything is right there. The only thing I get from there was
18 like a Spray Nine and the rag, that's it.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. I don't really stay on that --

21 Q. Do you remember any work being done by others going in that
22 room, in that basement meter room?

23 A. No.

24 Q. Do you remember on July 25th any -- the fire department
25 responding to an odor call?

1 A. No.

2 Q. No.

3 MS. GUNARATNAM: That's it.

4 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. John?

5 MR. CLEMENTSON: Nothing.

6 BY MR. PRICE:

7 Q. Steve Price. How late did -- were you working on the 10th,
8 Wednesday the 10th?

9 A. Eight to 5.

10 Q. Eight to 5.

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. Did you actually leave at 5 or --

13 A. Yeah. Because I always pick up my wife because she get off
14 like 6, so I got to be there or else.

15 Q. Understood.

16 A. Or something.

17 MR. CHHATRE: I think you are telling the truth.

18 MR. PANLAQUI: You know they got a GPS right, so she know
19 where you're at.

20 BY MR. PRICE:

21 Q. Have you spoken with any of your other employees who were
22 there later than you on that night? And did you learn anything
23 about that night?

24 A. It's like normal day, like, you know, we do our part, we do
25 our ticket, we do everything. Then, you know, like 4:45 we take a

1 break and then clock out.

2 Q. So nothing unusual that you were told or that you know of?

3 A. No. We just -- everything is normal, you know. I really
4 don't know this apartment because I've been here for 3 months.

5 MR. PRICE: Okay, that's all I have. Thank you.

6 LT. OLIN: Bill Olin, Montgomery County.

7 BY LT. OLIN:

8 Q. Well, I think -- do you remember me from the day 8709 with
9 the gas leak? While we were there doing the investigation, did
10 you unlock doors for us? No?

11 A. Oh, I was at the residence for about the gas.

12 Q. The gas leak?

13 A. Gas leak.

14 Q. Yes.

15 A. So I went --

16 Q. And you went down and unlocked doors for us so we could get
17 the people out of the building?

18 A. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

19 Q. Yes? 8709?

20 A. Yep.

21 Q. Yep. Do you know what the outcome of that was?

22 A. Not really. Because the fire department, when I got in with
23 the gas detector, all I did was help, you know, you guys to open
24 the door because I got all the keys. So, you know, everybody, you
25 know, knock on the door and let them out, you know, because they

1 said they smelling gas. So beside that, I don't -- really don't
2 know what happened.

3 LT. OLIN: Okay. That's all I got.

4 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Kelly.

5 MR. EMEABA: Kalu Kelly Emeaba.

6 BY MR. EMEABA:

7 Q. You mentioned the past 3 months you've been here you
8 responded to gas emergency.

9 A. Um-hum.

10 Q. One gas emergency?

11 A. Um-hum.

12 Q. And that was about 9:30 p.m. --

13 A. Um-hum.

14 Q. -- correct?

15 A. Yep.

16 Q. Were you still on duty when the emergency came?

17 A. I was on call so like 24 hours you're on duty. When you're
18 on call, you got 1 week on call, so you basically you're 24 hours.
19 So you do the call.

20 Q. So you came from your house, right?

21 A. Um-hum. No, I -- actually, I was around the area because,
22 you know, I was with my wife doing groceries, and when they called
23 me. So me and my wife went to the call.

24 MR. EMEABA: Thank you. That's all I got. Thank you.

25 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Great. I really have no follow-up

1 questions. Anybody?

2 If not, thank you so much for coming and waiting for us.

3 Appreciate it.

4 MR. PANLAQUI: Sure. I got out of a ticket. I got --

5 MR. CHHATRE: Off the record.

6 (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 Romel Panlaqui

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA16FP003

PLACE: Silver Spring, Maryland

DATE: August 27, 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