



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

February 21, 2017

Ronald Neil
Kay Management Company
8720 Georgia Avenue, Suite 410,
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910
Ronald Neil:

Reference: NTSB Accident No. DCA16FP003, Silver Spring, MD.
Your Interview conducted on August 27, 2016.

Enclosed is a copy of the transcript of your interview that was conducted as a part of the on-going investigation of the above referenced accident. Please review the transcript for accuracy and make any necessary editorial changes on the attached transcripts. Please put your initials next to each suggested change. After your review, please sign the attached endorsement and return it with the marked copy of the transcript to the following address on or before February 28, 2017:

Kalu Kelly Emeaba
National Transportation Safety Board (RPH-20)
490 L'Enfant Plaza East, S.W.
Washington, DC 20594.

Or if you desire e-mail your comments to: [REDACTED]

Please note that this transcript should be treated as confidential at this time. This transcript is for your use only, and is not for release. If you have any questions, please contact Investigator-in-Charge. Thank you for your assistance and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Electronic Signature

Ravindra M. Chhatre
Investigator-in-Charge

[REDACTED]

Enclosure

National Transportation Safety Board
Office of Railroad, Pipeline, and Hazardous Materials Investigations
490 L'Enfant Plaza East, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20594

Reference: NTSB Accident No. DCA16FP003, Silver Spring, MD.
Your Interview conducted on August 27, 2016.

I have reviewed my interview transcript from the above referenced accident and:

- (A) I have no comments to make.
- (B) My comments are submitted herewith.
- (C) My comments are marked on the attached copy.



Ronald Neil

8-24-17

Date

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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

Accident No.: DCA16FP003

* * * * *

Interview of: RONALD NEIL

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
Tel: [REDACTED]

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

JOHN CLEMENTSON, Assistant Chief Engineer
State of Maryland Public Service Commission
Tel: [REDACTED]

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

MARK PALMER, Esq.
Bacon, Thorton & Palmer, LLP
Tel: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

(On behalf of Kay Management Company and Mr. Neil)

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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. CHHATRE: -- Saturday, August 27, 2016. We are currently
3 at Pine Ridge Apartments, located at 8617 Piney Branch Road,
4 Silver Spring, Maryland. We are meeting regarding the
5 investigation of explosion of Building 8701, Flower Branch
6 Apartment, Silver Spring, Maryland that occurred on August 10,
7 2016.

8 My name is Ravi Chhatre. I am with National Transportation
9 Safety Board located in Washington, D.C., and I am Investigator-
10 in-Charge of this accident. The NTSB investigation number for
11 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 it
14 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. Ron Neil that you are
18 permitted to have one other person present with you during the
19 interview. This is a person of your choice: your supervisor,
20 friend, family member or, if you choose, no one at all.

21 Please state for the record your full name, spelling of your
22 name, organization you work for, your title and business contact
23 information such as mailing address, telephone number or email,
24 and whom you have chosen to be present with you during your
25 interview.

1 MR. NEIL: My name is Ronald Neil, spelled R-o-n-a-l-d, last
2 name N-e-i-l. What was the rest of it?

3 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Whom you have chosen to be present with
4 you?

5 MR. NEIL: Oh, Tom.

6 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

7 MR. PALMER: Mark.

8 MR. NEIL: Mark.

9 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

10 MR. NEIL: Thank you. I (indiscernible).

11 MR. CHHATRE: And well, you know, tell us whom you work for,
12 your title, organization?

13 MR. NEIL: I'm with Kay Management. My title is regional
14 engineering supervisor.

15 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

16 MR. NEIL: My cell number is 703 --

17 MR. CHHATRE: Oh, only the business contact.

18 MR. NEIL: That's it. [REDACTED]

19 MR. CHHATRE: And now I'd like to go around the room, have
20 each person introduce themselves. Please state your name,
21 spelling of your name, your title and the organization that you
22 represent and your business contact information, starting from my
23 left.

24 MS. GUNARATNAM: Rachael Gunaratnam, R-a-c-h-a-e-l,
25 G-u-n-a-r-a-t-n-a-m, NTSB hazmat investigator. Number: [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

MR. CLEMENTSON: John Clementson, C-l-e-m-e-n-t-s-o-n,
Assistant Chief Engineer, Maryland Public Service Commission;
[REDACTED].

MR. PRICE: I'm Steve Price. I am the Division Head of the
System Operations for Washington Gas and Electric. My cell phone
is [REDACTED]. My email is [REDACTED]

LT. OLIN: Lieutenant William Olin. Lieutenant William Olin,
Fire and Explosives Investigator for Montgomery County, Maryland.
My work phone: [REDACTED]. My email: William,
[REDACTED]

MR. PALMER: I am Mark Palmer. I am an attorney for Kay
Management Company. I'm with the law firm Bacon, Thornton and
Palmer. My name is M-a-r-k, P-a-l-m-e-r. My address is 6411 Ivy,
I-v-y, Lane, Suite 500, Greenbelt, Maryland 20706. My telephone
number is [REDACTED]. And my email is [REDACTED] as in
baker, t as in Thomas, p as in Peter.com.

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

MR. CHHATRE: Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW OF RONALD NEIL

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. Mr. Neil, just for the record, tell us any formal education,
work experience, how many years you worked with Kay, any prior

1 applicable experience, for the record?

2 A. I've been with Kay since 1984, working as -- I started as a
3 service tech, worked my way up to where I'm at now, to
4 engineering. I have had engineering schooling for stationary
5 engineering. I'm a licensed stationary engineer in the state of
6 Maryland.

7 Q. Okay. And as a regional engineering supervisor, what are
8 your duties with Kay?

9 A. My duties are to oversee the engineering on the properties in
10 Montgomery County and Virginia, both boiler and HVAC spilt-system
11 properties.

12 Q. Okay. So what does -- I guess in a layman's term, what do
13 your engineering responsibilities entail in the different
14 properties?

15 A. Well, boilers, make sure the engineers are following proper
16 procedures and make sure everything is operating correctly and
17 safely. And HVACs, basically the same thing. We have a lot of
18 equipment out there and it needs to be monitored and properly
19 maintained.

20 Q. Okay. So do you have a procedure that you will distribute to
21 all your properties that all the people are supposed to follow?

22 A. They do. They have standard procedures, they have regular
23 duties they must follow for checking on equipment and maintaining
24 it.

25 Q. And what kind of equipment we are talking about?

1 A. In the case of Flower Branch, it's HVAC systems, it's the
2 water heaters, and fire life safety systems.

3 Q. Fire?

4 A. Fire life safety systems, which is fire bells, smoke
5 detectors.

6 Q. Okay. What is HVAC for the --

7 A. Heat, vent and air conditioning systems. They're the split
8 systems that --

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. -- comfort, heating and cooling for the apartments.

11 MR. CHHATRE: And with that, I'll pass along with Kelly and
12 then I'll come back again.

13 Kelly?

14 BY MR. EMEABA:

15 Q. So how many -- this is Kelly Emeaba, or Kalu Kelly Emeaba.
16 Being a regional manager or supervisor, correct?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. How do you work with your technician on day-to-day
19 activities?

20 A. On day-to-day activities? I do not see each technician every
21 day. I monitor that they're filling out their logs correctly. I
22 walk their equipment with them periodically. I speak to them
23 regularly.

24 Q. Okay. How many -- how often do you speak with technicians
25 who are involved in the maintenance of the Flower Branch

1 Apartments?

2 A. For Flower Branch it was at least, minimum 3 to 4 days a
3 week, because we had a -- the engineer was fairly new. So to
4 bring him up to speed and make sure he's following our procedures,
5 I spent a lot of time with him to make sure, you know, if he's
6 having any problems, I'm there and available; he doesn't have to
7 call me. So it was approximately 3 or 4 days a week I would go
8 and see him.

9 Q. Okay. So if I may ask, you mentioned training that you have,
10 your education from the University of Maryland in engineering?

11 A. Yes. *N.A.P.E* 

12 Q. Yes. So the Flower Branch Apartment engineer, person whom
13 you say is new and all that, what qualification does he have to do
14 that?

15 A. He has several years' experience on HVAC, repair and
16 maintenance. He has a very good maintenance background. Although
17 he's new to that position, he is not new to Kay Management. So
18 he's got at least a 5-year background in maintenance and
19 engineering, maintenance on HVAC maintenance.

20 Q. Okay. Has he been with the, okay, the Flower Branch
21 Apartment for the 5 years, or was he moved from elsewhere?

22 A. No, no, no. He's been with Kay Management in various
23 positions. He's been in two or three different sites for Kay
24 Management, and he's been with -- in other companies. So he's
25 left and come back. So he's only been at Flower Branch for

1 approximately 4 to 5 months.

2 Q. Okay, 4 to 5 months?

3 A. That's correct.

4 Q. Okay. And being a new hire -- well, he's been rehire --

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. -- so do -- but we still see him as a new hire?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Yes. So what steps do you take to acquaint him to what was
9 in place at Flower Branch Apartments?

10 A. Well, you go through an orientation process for our general
11 procedures in Kay Management and how we do things. Plus, I spent
12 quite a bit of time with him when he starts, going over his
13 equipment, what he should be doing on a daily and weekly basis and
14 monthly basis as far as equipment checks, walking. They're
15 required to walk the property at least once a week, checking --
16 visual checks on the fire bells and various systems and the water
17 heaters, checking the flue pipes, proper operation of the water
18 heaters -- excuse me -- water temperatures, return pumps. So
19 those are weekly checks he has to do.

20 Daily, he should be checking, make sure the other guys don't
21 have problems with them, if they've had problems. He also
22 maintains the HVAC systems, and there are procedures when we
23 install new systems, how we want them installed. We have various
24 contractors we use. He needs to be familiar the contractors we
25 use for various operations.

1 Q. And just for the record, can you state the name of the
2 engineer that is (indiscernible)?

3 A. Eduardo. I don't know the last name.

4 Q. Eduardo?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Is a first name?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Okay. So is Eduardo, does he supervise other technicians?

9 A. Well, he's going to be the most experienced on the crew, so
10 he's not necessarily the supervisor, but he's a resource that the
11 other technicians can use because he does have more experience
12 than the other technicians, and he is available to them to provide
13 guidance or answer any questions that they have.

14 Q. Okay. So in his absence, who else can do what he does?

15 A. I have a nearby engineer that will cover his property when
16 needed, if he's on vacation or if he's absent.

17 Q. Okay. So in the last 3 months or month, do you have an idea
18 the kind of tasks he has overseen or worked on?

19 A. Many air conditioning calls. People call, he goes and
20 repairs air conditioning. He monitors his water heaters. He
21 monitors his fire bells and pull stations. Yeah, I mean, that's
22 what he does.

23 Q. Okay. I don't know if you've spoken to him since after the
24 accident, which is August the 10th. Do you know of some work
25 they've accomplished at 8701 Arliss Street since his work started

1 in the area of engineering?

2 A. Not offhand, beyond regular checks. But I mean --

3 Q. I know you mentioned at least you speak to him three, three
4 times or four times --

5 A. Three or four times a week. Absolutely.

6 Q. -- in a, during a week. So, so were there any -- based on
7 your normal discussions, you know, from the time you called him,
8 you know, anything was told you that he had to perform some work
9 or he guided some work to be done at 87- --

10 A. Not that I can remember offhand, no.

11 Q. Okay. I believe your -- the company record can tell if there
12 was some work?

13 A. Absolutely.

14 Q. Okay. So we look for the record of activities at 8701 Arliss
15 Avenue which Eduardo has been involved. And even though you are
16 not present unless you call on them, and all that, do they give
17 you a feedback if they encounter some problems?

18 A. Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. They can all call me 24 hours a
19 day. And if they have a larger problem, they have to call me, at
20 least let me know what's going on and we make sure we're getting
21 the proper response. I mean, that's just standard procedure.

22 Q. Okay. So --

23 A. So I'm available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

24 Q. Okay. So when you receive a complaint from them or a record
25 from them, what do you do from there?

1 A. Depends on the complaint or report. The response to
2 different situations is different.

3 Q. Okay. And where does that go to? After you receive a
4 report, a written report, who do you submit the report to? Who
5 actually (indiscernible)?

6 A. If it's an issue where -- if it's a minor issue that I can
7 help them with over the phone, that's it. If it's a more, if a
8 bigger issue where we'll need vendors or there's something else
9 going on, I will send an email regarding the issue. So I'll
10 handle the issue with him and I'll send an email letting everybody
11 basically know what we are doing and what was done.

12 Q. Okay. One more question. Prior to the hiring of Eduardo --

13 A. Yeah.

14 Q. -- have you been engaged directly in any of activity that
15 (indiscernible) 8701 yourself?

16 A. No.

17 Q. Okay. And before -- let me refer this way. Before Eduardo
18 came into or was put in that position, was there a transition
19 between him and the previous person who was --

20 A. There was.

21 Q. Did they meet or there was a gap between --

22 A. There was a gap.

23 Q. There was a gap. So at the time of the gap, can you tell me,
24 or tell us if any work was happening, how was it being handled?

25 A. Well, basically it's been handled with any issues or

1 emergency they have, I have another engineer in the area that
2 would cover that property. So anything beyond what the
3 maintenance can handle, I call in the other engineer and have him
4 come take care of it for them, or provide them whatever guidance
5 they need. There's always an engineer covering every property.

6 Q. So please, if you can, lead me through, based on your work
7 records you written in previous past, an issue like a water
8 heater, what could be some often issues that result from a water
9 heater?

10 A. Well, if it misfires, whatever parts it needs and whatever
11 diagnosis it has, we have it repaired. If it's leaking, we have
12 it replaced. That's pretty much it.

13 Q. When you say misfire, can you explain the difference --

14 A. If the igniter for some reason doesn't work, they have
15 safeties on. They have flame safeties. So if it goes to light,
16 pilot comes on, it does not sense a pilot, it will misfire and it
17 will just shut down until an operator comes and sees what the
18 problem is. So there's various safeties on them that prevent them
19 from firing if there's an issue.

20 Q. Okay. If the pilot goes off -- I should say, if it misfire,
21 correct?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. And then the pilot goes off?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Okay. What happens to the gas supply that goes to --

1 A. It stops. It will not open the main gas supply.

2 Q. So how do you then, if you want to put it back online to
3 reignite it after that process --

4 A. We would have to diagnose the problem and see why the pilot
5 is not coming on correctly or why it's not sensing the pilot.

6 Q. Okay. So their sense of it misfiring is because it will not
7 sense the pilot?

8 A. If the pilot does not come on, if maybe the spark is not
9 right, it's not in the gas or whatever, it's not sparking
10 correctly, the pilot light will not light; it will not sense a
11 flame and it will not turn on the main gas valve. There's built-
12 in flame safeties on all hot water heaters, just like all boilers.
13 So those are flame safeties that are built onto it.

14 It has high limits on it. If water temperature goes too
15 high, it'll shut the -- shut the boiler down, or it'll shut the
16 water heater down. As well as any time the flame goes out, gas,
17 the main gas valves will shut down. So if you had a main flame --
18 and I've never seen this actually happen -- but if for some reason
19 the sensor went bad or for -- the flame went out with the gas on,
20 it will immediately shut down the gas valve.

21 Q. Okay. And within the utility rooms, what are the common
22 issues that you have experienced that occur?

23 A. Generally it's going to be water leaks.

24 Q. From where?

25 A. From apartments above. Could be a toilet wax ring, it could

1 be a pipe leak. Those are the majority of problems in the utility
2 rooms is going to be water leaks.

3 Q. Are there some issue that could relate to the pipe, I mean,
4 the gas pipeline system?

5 A. Generally no. That would be a rare occasion.

6 Q. Thank you so much. I will pass it on to others.

7 MR. CHHATRE: Rachael?

8 BY MS. GUNARATNAM:

9 Q. Okay. I just had a question, a couple questions about you
10 mentioned the regular duties that they do, they go and check the
11 HVACs, the water heater, life and safety, you know, fire life and
12 safety. Do they also check on anything regarding the gas meters
13 or do any work there?

14 A. No.

15 Q. Okay. Does their orientation include any safety training on
16 natural gas since they're going to be around it?

17 A. No. I don't believe it does. None of our technicians are
18 allowed to work on natural gas lines.

19 Q. And do they log any of their work anywhere?

20 A. We have a computerized ticket system.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. How does that work, exactly? Is it for any little --

24 A. Well, a work order is generated for pretty much everything.
25 Once they complete the work order, they fill out a description of

1 the work, turn it into office, and it's entered into the computer.

2 Q. Is that only for something that gets -- that's broken or is
3 it also include inspections or the daily routine of checking
4 something?

5 A. They do have logs for the daily and the weekly checks, so --

6 Q. Okay. Have you ever been inside 8701, the basement itself?

7 A. I have, probably when I was showing Eduardo around when I
8 first hired him. I've been in there probably once or twice.

9 Q. And you say he started about 4 or 5 months ago?

10 A. Correct.

11 Q. Do you remember what was in the room at the time?

12 A. No.

13 Q. Okay. Do you remember the orientation of the room? Can you
14 describe the room at all or --

15 A. Just from what I've seen standing up at the top, looking down
16 at it. No.

17 Q. Okay. And what do you remember, anything?

18 A. Well, I know where the door and the gas meters are and the
19 general shape of the room.

20 Q. Okay. How far --

21 A. That's about it.

22 Q. How far was the water heater from the gas meter? Do you
23 remember?

24 A. It was approximately, I would say, maybe 6 feet away.

25 Q. Six feet away. Was it in a fenced --

1 A. No. That was -- it would be in the laundry rooms but in that
2 particular room, no. Because that room was not open to the
3 public.

4 Q. All right. So no fence around the water heater?

5 A. No.

6 Q. And who had access to that room?

7 A. The maintenance crew, basically the maintenance crew and the
8 office would have access.

9 Q. Okay. And how was it locked? By a key --

10 A. With locks.

11 Q. Just a key?

12 A. Yeah, a key lock.

13 Q. Okay. And was there a security system on it?

14 A. No.

15 Q. Okay. And was there any appliances, like a washer or dryer,
16 in there? You said no?

17 A. There was air conditioning systems in there.

18 Q. But new ones or --

19 A. Brand new, in the box.

20 Q. Brand new in the box. Do you remember how many ranges?

21 A. From talking with the guys, there were about seven condensers
22 -- or three condensers, maybe seven furnaces and I think seven,
23 eight coils.

24 Q. Were there any chemicals also stored in there?

25 A. There is an inventory I got from the guys that I submitted --

1 Q. Oh, okay. All right.

2 A. -- for the entire contents of the room, to the best of their
3 recollection.

4 Q. Okay. So are they -- you mentioned they're not allowed to
5 touch anything with the gas meters, but are they able to detect
6 what to do -- are they trained on what to do when they smell gas?

7 A. We -- yes, we do have combustible gas detectors on every
8 property and we do have liquid gas detectors in every property.

9 Q. And how often do they use, like --

10 A. As needed.

11 Q. As needed? Okay.

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. Okay. And they receive training on those detectors?

14 A. They receive just in-house training. They're very intuitive,
15 so there's -- we haven't done any formal training as of yet on
16 them.

17 Q. So basically on-the-job training? Like someone should
18 send --

19 A. Yup. Absolutely, yeah.

20 Q. Okay. Do they use that just in the utility room or for
21 anywhere on the property?

22 A. Anywhere.

23 Q. Anywhere on the property?

24 A. Anywhere.

25 Q. Okay. Do you remember it being used recently at 8701?

1 A. No.

2 Q. Okay. Do you -- you don't know the type of water heater, by
3 any chance, that was in 8701?

4 A. No, not offhand.

5 Q. Okay. That's all I got.

6 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. John? Oh, you can go ahead and ask.

7 MR. CLEMENTSON: I can?

8 MR. CHHATRE: Yeah. Everybody can ask.

9 BY MR. CLEMENTSON:

10 Q. All right. This is John Clementson for the Public Service
11 Commission. What type of gas detectors are available?

12 A. Most of them we have are the TIF. They're going to be the
13 86- to 8800 series.

14 Q. And those are just the audible type?

15 A. Yes. They actually have a -- they have a video -- visible
16 line of just LED lights. But yes, also audible.

17 MR. PRICE: Is that all you had, John?

18 MR. CLEMENTSON: Yeah.

19 BY MR. PRICE:

20 Q. Good morning. Steve Price, Washington Gas. Mr. Neil, I
21 didn't quite -- maybe I didn't catch the air conditioning units,
22 condensers and chemicals that you respond to --

23 A. They're -- I've submitted an inventory of the contents of the
24 room to the best of the maintenance recollection. I got all of
25 the guys together and just went over the contents of the room and

1 put it on a spreadsheet, so that should be available to everybody.

2 MR. PRICE: Okay. So Ravi, is that -- do you have that or --

3 MR. CHHATRE: When we get -- each of you will get it. Right
4 now we don't have it.

5 MR. PRICE: Okay.

6 BY MR. PRICE:

7 Q. And that's the contents of 8701?

8 A. That's correct. The storage room.

9 Q. And it's the meter room?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Is there any other storage space that you use in 8701?

12 A. There was a maintenance shop. Their main maintenance shop
13 was across the hall.

14 Q. And what materials did you routinely store there?

15 A. Every, all the parts for maintenance. The equipment for
16 drain cleaning, pretty much everything else you would use for
17 daily maintenance.

18 Q. Were there any working machines, in other words machines that
19 you stored in the meter room that had either gasoline or
20 propane --

21 A. That would be listed in the contents of the room.

22 Q. Okay. All right. Was there space underneath the stairwell
23 going down to the terrace floor that you used for storage?

24 A. No. No.

25 Q. There's no space or you didn't use it?

- 1 A. There's no space being used under any of the stairwells.
- 2 Q. Who did Eduardo replace 4 or 5 months ago?
- 3 A. I believe his name was Walter. I don't remember his last
4 name.
- 5 Q. Do you remember the reason Walter left your employment?
- 6 A. There was good reason, but it's not mine. So I don't know
7 how much I should talk about that. It was not on the -- it was
8 not anything related to his daily duties.
- 9 Q. Okay. But he left for cause?
- 10 A. Absolutely.
- 11 Q. Was he on good terms with Kay Management when he left?
- 12 A. No.
- 13 Q. Do you know where he is now?
- 14 A. No. He was not upset. He just didn't leave under -- he's
15 not eligible for rehire.
- 16 Q. Okay.
- 17 A. To the best of my knowledge.
- 18 Q. The access to 8701, you mentioned, is by key?
- 19 A. Yes.
- 20 Q. Who has access to those keys?
- 21 A. The on-site staff.
- 22 Q. Do they have to sign a key out?
- 23 A. No.
- 24 Q. Are they issued a key?
- 25 A. Yes.

1 Q. And they keep the key with them?

2 A. The service techs keep the keys with them. The engineer
3 keeps a key with them. The office staff would have a central key
4 that they would use in key board or in the key tracker, somewhere
5 like that. I don't know where they keep it.

6 Q. So with that key, they can open up the door to the meter
7 room?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Do they have to sign in or out of the meter room?

10 A. No.

11 Q. How many staff personnel have keys to the meter room?

12 A. All the service techs, the engineer.

13 Q. How many is that?

14 A. I don't -- right now --

15 Q. Approximately?

16 A. -- four service techs, one engineer.

17 Q. And the engineer is Eduardo right now?

18 A. That's correct.

19 Q. Since --

20 A. Or three service techs I think, yeah. I'm sorry.

21 Q. And since the explosion and fire, have you talked with all of
22 the service techs and engineers regarding -- you know, in light of
23 the incident?

24 A. As far as what?

25 Q. Just about if they had any knowledge about what had gone on

1 in the hours, days, weeks before this incident?

2 A. Well, I've asked them if they had any reports of gas leak or
3 if anybody noticed anything in that room unusual.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. That's about it. I haven't talked or spoken extensively with
6 them. Quite frankly, we haven't had time to talk.

7 Q. Understood. Did any of them offer you any information
8 regarding anything unusual in and or around 8701?

9 A. No. No.

10 Q. So you --

11 A. They indicated they'd been in the room, but they haven't --
12 they didn't notice anything out of the norm.

13 Q. Did they indicate why they had been in the room?

14 A. They do have storage in the room where they have to get
15 materials in and out of.

16 Q. And they didn't report any kind of gas odor or any kind of
17 odd --

18 A. No. No.

19 Q. -- issues of any kind?

20 A. No. With the water heater in the room, Eduardo would've been
21 in there regularly checking the water heater.

22 Q. You did mention he monitors the water heaters in each
23 building. Is that a daily checklist that he has to do?

24 A. It's a weekly -- I ask him to walk it weekly and check the
25 water heaters. They are pressure vessels, so we treat them as

1 such.

2 Q. We had understood that there was a senior person that had
3 been in that meter -- a senior person with Kay Management that had
4 been in 8701 meter room I think a couple of days before the
5 incident occurred. Do you know who that person was?

6 A. No.

7 Q. Do you know Michael Stith (ph.)? Do you know --

8 A. No. I know Chuck Stith.

9 Q. Chuck Stith, I'm sorry.

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Do you know -- were you present or aware that he was onsite
12 in the few days before?

13 A. No.

14 Q. There have been reports, at least in the press, that
15 individuals had smelled odors of gas in the -- some time period
16 before this incident, days, weeks, months even. Are you aware of
17 any reports of gas odors from any of the residents of 8701 or 8703
18 in any time period prior to this incident?

19 A. No.

20 Q. If there had been a report of a gas odor to your maintenance
21 people, what is the process?

22 A. They would check, they would go up and check it. They would
23 use just their sense of smell, they would use the combustible gas
24 detector to try to determine the source. If they had a problem or
25 if it was a very strong odor, they would call 911. If it was a

1 light odor and they didn't know what to do, they would call me,
2 you know. I'm there pretty much every day, so they could tell me.

3 Q. And would they ever take any action themselves in an
4 apartment, for instance, if there was an issue, to address a gas
5 leak?

6 A. Only if it were on a stove, they can shut the gas valve down.
7 They can work on the stove itself, replace an oven valve or
8 something like that, but they can't replace the flex line. If
9 they needed a flex line replaced, the most they can do is shut
10 down the stove and we'd bring in a licensed contractor to do flex
11 lines or any pipe work.

12 Q. And do you have more than one licensed contractor you use for
13 the house pipeline work?

14 A. Over there we've been using just one since I can remember.

15 Q. And was that --

16 A. It was a long way back. Associates Plumbing.

17 Q. Is that also known as API?

18 A. That's correct.

19 Q. Are you aware of any work that API performed on any of the
20 equipment at 8701 in some time frame?

21 A. They're -- I submitted a list of all their work orders for
22 the past 3 years. I requested it from them and submitted that.

23 Q. And do you have any knowledge as to whether that includes any
24 work at 8701?

25 A. I'd have to look at the list. I don't remember.

1 Q. When a resident calls in a gas odor, is there a record of
2 that call-in?

3 A. Absolutely.

4 Q. Who maintains that record?

5 A. The office staff. They do a work order on any call,
6 regardless of the call.

7 Q. And is that record, would that include any action taken as a
8 result of that work --

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. -- that complaint?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. There was a report, again, at least in the press, that there
13 was a 911 call to a fire department, to the Flower Branch
14 Apartments on July 25th. Were you made aware of such a call at
15 the time?

16 A. No. I heard about it in the press and I did discuss it with
17 the fire marshal, or the fire chief.

18 Q. Beyond that, do you have any knowledge of it?

19 A. Far as I know, the call existed, but they were unable to find
20 anything.

21 Q. You're on the engineering side of things. Do you get
22 involved in any other issues involving tenants at Flower Branch
23 beyond the maintenance concerns?

24 A. No, only when there's an issue that they can't resolve for
25 some reason. That would be the only time I'd get involved. But

1 it's very rare.

2 Q. Have you been involved in the last 6 months or a year with
3 any tenant issues, beyond the --

4 A. No.

5 Q. -- maintenance issues we've talked about?

6 A. No.

7 Q. So based upon what you've seen, in the 6 months prior to this
8 incident, there's been no increase of known gas odors or gas
9 issues in the meter room of 8701?

10 A. No.

11 Q. And none in the appliance sort of house line side of 8701?

12 A. There's been no gas smells reported, and when I've been in
13 there the past few months, I've, you know, I've never noticed one.

14 Q. Okay. And nothing involving the water heater of 8701, to
15 your knowledge?

16 A. No.

17 Q. From your recollection, in the meter room of 8701, are you
18 familiar with the windows in that meter room?

19 A. No.

20 Q. Are there any -- are you aware of any actual fuel maintained
21 in the storage facility of 8701, either in the meter room or the
22 maintenance room or elsewhere?

23 A. No. Whatever they've found in the -- in the debris
24 subsequently. There should be no gasoline-powered appliances
25 anywhere in any of our buildings.

1 Q. That's just per your --

2 A. It's company policy.

3 Q. -- instructions?

4 A. Yeah. And fire marshal instructions. They do inspect us
5 regularly, annually.

6 Q. Does WSSC conduct any inspections of your gas line systems
7 that you're aware of and that you're -- that you're aware of?

8 A. As far as preventative maintenance inspections, not to my
9 knowledge.

10 Q. Have they ever been on site, to your knowledge, for any other
11 reason with respect to the gas line or gas system?

12 A. Not to my knowledge offhand, no.

13 Q. We had understood, and I think, from looking at the
14 facilities there, that the meter room to 8701 was on the alarm
15 system. Is that not the case?

16 A. Not to my knowledge. Generally storage rooms aren't on an
17 alarm system. If it was, it's unusual.

18 Q. Okay. But the building itself is on an alarm system?

19 A. I don't know. The office is on an alarm system.

20 Q. Do you have any knowledge as to how that works or gets
21 deactivated or --

22 A. I know they have a code. I don't get involved in that at
23 all.

24 Q. Okay. When an employee leaves the employment of Kay and
25 they've been given a key to access facilities, are they required

1 to turn those keys in?

2 A. Oh, absolutely.

3 Q. Would there be a record of that?

4 A. It would just be in whatever is in their termination papers.

5 Q. Is there a policy to change the locks on any of the
6 facilities upon -- you know, on any kind of periodic basis or upon
7 cause?

8 A. I don't know that we have a policy on it. It is not unusual
9 for us to do that.

10 Q. Do you know if that has been done in the recent past?

11 A. No, I don't.

12 MR. PRICE: That's all I have. Thanks. Thank you, Mr. Neil.

13 BY LT OLIN:

14 Q. Lieutenant Olin, Montgomery County. Bill. I'm sorry.

15 So the hot water heater, so do you know -- it's electronic
16 ignition or a standing pilot?

17 A. It's electronic ignition.

18 Q. Electronic ignition. Okay. Do your engineers make repairs
19 to that, to the hot water heater as -- you say, like, when you
20 make repairs to the stove, they won't touch the flex pipe but
21 they'll make repairs to valves and stuff like that?

22 A. Correct.

23 Q. Is that the case, would that be the same case with a hot
24 water heater --

25 A. Correct.

1 Q. -- if you're an engineer?

2 A. He can replace, say, the pilot light. Pretty much that's the
3 only replaceable part for him on the water heater.

4 Q. Does the electronic ignition have a thermal couple?

5 A. No, it's --

6 Q. No.

7 A. -- it's a flame rod.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. So he could take that out. That's part of the pallet
10 assembly. You can take that out, clean it, service it.

11 Q. Sure.

12 A. And that's pretty much it. Gas valve would have to be
13 replaced by a licensed contractor.

14 Q. When they're doing that kind of work, would they be using
15 their gas detector meters to --

16 A. Once they bring it back on?

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. Once they bring it back on, they should be thoroughly
19 checking for leaks. They'd probably use bubbles --

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. -- at that point.

22 Q. Okay. Smoke detectors in your apartments in the building,
23 battery powered or electric?

24 A. Both.

25 Q. Both?

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. In all the units or --

3 A. Yes. Electric with battery backup.

4 Q. Okay. There have been -- I'm getting documents back that
5 there was a sprinkler system. That building isn't sprinklered,
6 was it?

7 A. I don't know. I don't know.

8 Q. It was built before the requirement, so you all, to your
9 knowledge, haven't retrofitted the apartment with sprinklers?

10 A. No.

11 Q. Okay. I got the security system. The electronic key system
12 that you all use --

13 A. Yeah.

14 Q. -- is that, to my understanding, is just to gain access to
15 the building itself; is that correct, not individual apartments?
16 It just gains you access to the common areas?

17 A. Ask the question again?

18 Q. The electronic key system?

19 A. Our electronic -- like our key track system for the keys?

20 Q. Key -- what is it called?

21 A. Key track -- or we actually have an electronic security
22 system for the keys. Those are the keys to go to apartments,
23 mainly.

24 Q. Okay. It's not like a electronic device to get into the --
25 you actually have to use a key and a tumbler to get into the

1 main --

2 A. Correct.

3 Q. Okay. Were there any type of detectors in the meter room, to
4 your knowledge?

5 A. Should've been a smoke detector.

6 Q. Smoke detector? In the exemplar meter rooms that we looked
7 at around the -- very clean, very organized. The gas piping was
8 all painted yellow?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Do you know if that would've been the case in 8701? Would
11 that have been painted yellow as well?

12 A. I have no idea. I don't know why it wouldn't, but I have no
13 idea if it was.

14 Q. Okay. And do you know, by chance, know when that was painted
15 yellow?

16 A. No.

17 Q. Okay. Are you aware of a gas odor call that went out last
18 week at 8709 Arliss when we investigate -- while we were there, an
19 odor of gas?

20 A. Yeah, there -- everybody was smelling gas immediately after
21 the explosion --

22 Q. Okay. Okay. Do you have any outdoor storage, like sheds or
23 anything like that to store combustible materials, lawnmowers or
24 pressure washers or whatever?

25 A. No. They store them actually on this property inside a

*Pine Ridge
Gossett*

1 ventilated garage.

2 Q. Okay. That's it.

3 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

4 BY MR. CHHATRE:

5 Q. Ravi Chhatre, NTSB. I think you, maybe you answered the
6 question already. Venting in 8701, do you know what kind of
7 venting system was there? Was it a pipe coming in or there's a
8 window on the, windowsill? Is that the --

9 A. I have no idea.

10 Q. Okay. We can ask that too. And was there any natural gas
11 alarm in 8701?

12 A. We wouldn't have had a combustible gas alarm, to my
13 knowledge.

14 Q. Okay. Are you familiar, the alarms are available or not?

15 A. Am I familiar that they're available?

16 Q. Yeah.

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Okay. Do you know when the -- would you know, rather, where,
19 when the air conditioning or water heaters are purchased for each
20 building, or you will not know?

21 A. Would I know where they're purchased?

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. If a new purchase is there, will you know that -- 8703 you
25 had a new water heater or air conditioning put in --

1 A. Well, they would have to call me to authorize the new water
2 heater.

3 Q. Oh, so they would --

4 A. So if the water heater was leaking, they would have to call
5 me to authorize the purchase, yes.

6 Q. Okay. So you are the one who authorize the replacement?

7 A. That's correct.

8 Q. Okay. So do you know when the water heater in 8701 was
9 purchased or replaced?

10 A. Not offhand, no.

11 Q. By -- was it recently, in last 5, 10 years, or --

12 A. I don't know.

13 Q. Don't know? Okay. Not a problem. So you authorize them,
14 but who selects the water heater or air conditioning unit?

15 A. The air conditioning units are selected by our company. The
16 entire company buys the same air conditioning units from the same
17 company --

18 Q. You go mass, mass purchase?

19 A. Well, not mass purchase. We make a deal with this company
20 and these are the units we're going to use throughout the company.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. All right. The water heaters are going to be dependent on
23 where they're being located and what type of equipment we need in
24 that location. Okay? So they're not standardized. There's
25 various requirements, height requirements, space requirements.

1 Q. Capacity --

2 A. Openings of the doors. There's capacities. Sot there's a
3 lot of factors there.

4 Q. So that can be a local purchase. It doesn't have to be a
5 central contract. That can be a local purchase then? Who makes
6 that decision which one to purchase, I guess is what I'm asking?
7 Would you be making that decision or the local manager would be
8 making that decision?

9 A. Well, I would make that decision generally. We're going to
10 call in our plumbing company and we're going to measure it up and
11 we're going to -- we'll usually match what's in there. If we
12 deicide to change the equipment, then yes, I would make that
13 decision on which equipment we'd be using.

14 Q. Okay. And the water heater in 8701, and I believe I was told
15 there are no washing machines or dryers --

16 A. No.

17 Q. -- in that room. So would that water heater be serving the
18 office and all the tenants?

19 A. Correct.

20 Q. Okay. So all these water heaters, are they industrial
21 grades, just because they are serving so many --

22 A. They're commercial water heaters, yes.

23 Q. Commercial water heaters. Okay. How often do you encounter
24 any problems or repair requirements on water heaters in general?

25 A. In general? Occasionally.

1 Q. Occasionally?

2 A. Yeah. They're not very often. I mean, there is occasionally
3 a problem with them. It's just not very often. Usually it's a
4 pilot igniter.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. A minor issue. And generally, even though our guys are
7 allowed to do them, we have contractors come out --

8 Q. Come and do it, yeah. Are most of the water heaters in this
9 particular property are electronic ignitions or they are pilot?

10 A. They're mostly electronic ignitions.

11 Q. And same thing with 8703, electronic?

12 A. I don't know. I believe it is.

13 Q. Okay. So do you know, or you would not know -- and you said
14 the water heater in 8701 was about 6 feet from the gas meters?

15 A. Approximately.

16 Q. Approximate, yes. Approximately. Now, the entrance to the
17 gas meter, water heater, do you call that room a mechanics room or
18 what is the terminology used?

19 A. We call it storage room.

20 Q. Even with the gas meters and the --

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. -- oh, the storage room, okay.

23 A. Yeah -- storage.

24 Q. So your staff going into the storage room --

25 A. I mean, I would call it a storage room --

1 Q. Yeah.

2 A. -- if I wanted to go in there, yeah.

3 Q. So would they be using the staircase to go into that room, or
4 would they be going through office to go into that --

5 A. Yeah, they usually go up to their maintenance shop and it
6 would be right across the hall. Because the maintenance shops
7 usually had an access door to the hallway and the access door was
8 there, so -- the time I've been in that room, we went through the
9 maintenance shop to that door.

10 Q. Maintenance shops. So it will be on the door to maintenance
11 shop and then you go through maintenance shop -- so you wouldn't
12 use the staircase, I guess is what I'm asking.

13 A. No. No.

14 Q. Okay. I think you already answered the question that after
15 Walter left, locks were not changed, to your knowledge?

16 A. I have no idea if they were.

17 Q. Oh, okay, you don't. We can ask somebody. Okay.

18 Now do you -- did you do any follow-up on the, approximately
19 2 weeks ago before the accident, the fire department call? Were
20 there any follow-up done on that or do you --

21 A. I had no idea they were called.

22 Q. Okay. Okay. Was there any, well, I guess, log kept,
23 electronic, whatever, as to tell somebody entered your storage
24 room? Would anybody know who entered the storage room --

25 A. No.

- 1 Q. -- when -- well, not the person, but anybody?
- 2 A. No.
- 3 Q. No. Okay.
- 4 A. Not to my knowledge.
- 5 Q. Okay. And what time the office will close? Typically what
6 are the business hours for your engineers, mechanic staff?
- 7 A. The engineer leaves at 5. I believe the office staff leaves
8 at 6.
- 9 Q. Okay.
- 10 A. I believe the offices close at 6 now.
- 11 Q. And so what happens later than -- if somebody loses hot
12 water, somebody loses air conditioning, what they do after 6:00?
- 13 A. They would call the office and put in an emergency line -- we
14 have an emergency line they can --
- 15 Q. Okay.
- 16 A. -- access through that, and it will call the -- I believe we
17 have an answering service that would call the appropriate on-call
18 personnel.
- 19 Q. So there would be a record if somebody --
- 20 A. Yes.
- 21 Q. -- went to that room after 6:00?
- 22 A. There would be a record of the call, yes.
- 23 Q. Right. Okay. So typically, is it fair to say that nobody
24 would enter your storage or mechanics room after 6:00?
- 25 A. Generally, no.

1 Q. Now your water heater, how often it cycles, with the 14
2 apartments in there? What are your temperature range, I guess,
3 reset or -- does it comes through the manufacturer or you set it?

4 A. Well, they come from the manufacturer set low. We generally
5 like to run about 122 degree water.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. So you'll have a couple degrees differential. There's not
8 going to be a large differential. There's not going to be a 5 or
9 10 degree differential on it.

10 Q. So --

11 A. It maintains a pretty constant temperature. It's going to be
12 just a few degrees.

13 Q. So, I mean, since you -- I see an engineer, I'm going to pick
14 your brain. Now --

15 A. It depends on time of day, how many people are using it as
16 how often it cycles.

17 Q. Right, right.

18 A. All right.

19 Q. But I guess my question is at what temperature range the
20 burners will kick in? I mean, you said your set temperature is
21 122 degrees, right?

22 A. No, no -- 122.

23 Q. Yeah, 1-2-2.

24 A. Oh, okay. You scared me for a minute.

25 Q. So, no, no, no. So what happens, I mean, at what temperature

1 the --

2 A. If we're set at 122 and we're maintaining 122 degrees, you
3 might go down to 120, 119 before --

4 Q. Right. Sure.

5 A. -- it has a call for more hot water. So you're only going to
6 have a couple degrees --

7 Q. Differential.

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. But I mean, educate me. I don't know. In a water heater,
10 the water's hot?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Let's just say suddenly a whole bunch of people decide to
13 take a shower or whatever --

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. -- and a lot of hot water is getting consumed.

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. When does the cold water starts coming in?

18 A. As soon as they open their faucet, they're taking hot water
19 out of the system, cold water has to --

20 Q. Starts coming in.

21 A. -- come back in and replace it.

22 Q. Okay. So it's continuous process?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Okay. So the temperature is maintained 122. If suddenly I
25 start putting the cold water in --

1 A. Yes. So you have about a 70-gallon capacity, so somebody
2 opening their faucet does not necessarily immediately affect the
3 water heater.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. It takes time.

6 Q. Okay. I guess that's what I was really trying to understand.

7 A. Yeah. Faucet's about 1.3 gallons per minute, so that 75-
8 gallon water heater, if you're pulling 1.3 gallons a minute off of
9 it, it takes a few minutes before it'll notice it.

10 Q. It's really (indiscernible) --

11 A. If everybody rushes and turns their faucets on, it'll come on
12 quicker.

13 Q. Okay. But eventually -- like a few minutes after somebody
14 really starts -- and the reason I shower is because
15 (indiscernible) --

16 A. It is definitely temperature -- controlled by temperature.

17 Q. Okay. Okay.

18 A. You know, yes.

19 Q. Okay. So you can -- I got --

20 A. You can fluctuate a couple degrees. It does not fluctuate
21 much.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. Yeah. So it wouldn't do to have it set at 120 and have them
24 drop down to 115 or 112.

25 Q. And then it kick in --

1 A. Then we would get complaints of water fluctuations.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. So it's only a few degrees.

4 Q. Okay. And there are no CO2 detector in your storage room?

5 A. Not to my knowledge, no.

6 Q. Okay. Okay. Now, gas valve replacement, I think that's what
7 you said, that's probably the only part you probably will need
8 replacement, like, if anything --

9 A. Well, no -- the pilot replacement is about the only thing
10 that the engineer --

11 Q. Oh, pilot. Okay.

12 A. -- can do under our policy. Gas valve replacement would be a
13 contractor.

14 Q. A contractor?

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. Okay. How often will they have to do that?

17 A. Rarely.

18 Q. Okay. And is that because gas is dirty and kind of plugs the
19 valve or the valve malfunctions?

20 A. On a rare occasion, a valve fails.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. Can you -- do you know how the valve functions in the water
24 heater?

25 A. As far as?

1 Q. Well, if I understand correctly, the valve is the one that
2 would let the gas in?

3 A. Right.

4 Q. The valve has to open?

5 A. Right.

6 Q. So is it a electronic thing, is it a mechanical thing? How
7 is that set? Do you know that?

8 A. It is electronic. We have -- it has an electronic control
9 that if it senses -- once you have a call, the pilot comes on --
10 it's a firing sequence. The pilot light comes on and if the pilot
11 is sensed by the flame rod, it will report back to the control,
12 and then the control will say, okay --

13 Q. Open the valve.

14 A. -- open up the main flame.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. All right? If it doesn't sense the pilot, it won't open the
17 main flame.

18 Q. Right. Okay.

19 A. So there is a central control there.

20 Q. So with the valve, then, something has to go wrong
21 electronically, I guess, for it not to function?

22 A. Generally solenoid valves aren't going to work or --

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. Okay. And what kind of warranty you have on your water

1 heaters?

2 A. Five years.

3 Q. Five years. Parts, labor, everything?

4 A. Yeah. I mean -- well, the tanks are 5 years. The parts are
5 going to probably be 1 year.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. So --

8 Q. All electronic, everything else will be 1 year?

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. Okay. And you said earlier that you required them to go and
11 check the water heater once a week, I think?

12 A. I like them checked every once a week, yeah.

13 Q. I mean, roughly, roughly. I mean, I --

14 A. Right.

15 Q. Yeah, I'm not telling it -- like it --

16 A. Right.

17 Q. -- can be 7 day, it can be 6 day, it can be 8 days, but --

18 A. Right.

19 Q. -- roughly once a week.

20 So what do they check on the water heater?

21 A. Basic visual check, make sure operation is correct, make sure
22 the temperature is correct. Should check the return pump and make
23 sure the return pump is actually working. The return pumps are a
24 big failure. They'll appear to be working and they won't be
25 moving any water.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. So, and then we'd get water complaints with no hot water.

3 So, I mean, generally they should visibly inspect the flue piping,
4 make sure that is in good shape.

5 Q. Okay. So, and my last question here, can the gas keep, I
6 guess, going into your water heater even though there's no pilot
7 or there is no --

8 A. No.

9 Q. There is no way that can --

10 A. No. The way we --

11 Q. -- no way that can happen?

12 A. No, no, that would --

13 Q. Can that happen only if the valve fails in any shape or form?

14 A. If the valve generally fails, fails safe. I've never seen a
15 valve fail open.

16 Q. Okay. So if valve fails, it's just not going to let the
17 water heater function period?

18 A. Correct.

19 Q. Okay. And you haven't seen any failure with valve open? I
20 mean, it doesn't open fail; it's a closed fail?

21 A. Never -- right. I've never seen or heard of a valve failing
22 in that manner.

23 Q. And the gas coming in?

24 A. Right.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. And it always fails safe. It fails closed. Water heater
2 just doesn't function.

3 Q. Okay. That helps. I mean, that's all I have. Very
4 educational. I appreciate that.

5 A. Okay.

6 MR. CHHATRE: Anybody has any follow-up questions? Kelly,
7 you started?

8 MR. EMEABA: Just --

9 MR. CHHATRE: And let's keep the follow-up questions to a
10 minimum, if we can.

11 BY MR. EMEABA:

12 Q. Yeah, just -- yeah, just one. One of the questions was the
13 911 call, emergency call in July, on July 25th?

14 A. Um-hum.

15 Q. Just, you know, to get more information, was the caller
16 identified?

17 A. I have no idea. I was not aware of the call.


18 Q. Okay.

19 A. I learned about it in the media.

20 Q. Okay. One more thing, just to get a clarification, which
21 questions has come to you a couple of -- from a couple of people.
22 The electronic access key, which you've mentioned that the storage
23 location, the utility location at 8701 doesn't have any access
24 (indiscernible)?

25 A. No to my knowledge, no.

1 Q. Is that applicable to all storage location in the whole
2 complex of --

3 A. Yeah, they're just key blocks. *hock* 

4 Q. Okay. You mentioned the combustible gas indicator that are
5 used by the technicians --

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. -- to do the work. Do you have an idea how many that you
8 have in your system that these technicians use?

9 A. We have a minimum of one on each property. Many properties
10 have multiple.

11 Q. So the Branch -- what is it called?

12 A. Flower Branch.

13 Q. Flower Branch has one?

14 A. Absolutely.

15 Q. And who else?

16 A. Flower Branch has one. Pine Ridge has one. Good Acre has
17 one. Each property has their own combustible gas detector.

18 Q. Okay. Do you know how they are maintained, those combustible
19 gas indicator?

20 A. As far as?

21 Q. To make sure they are effectively working?

22 A. Other than keeping them charged, the only -- the factory
23 actually recommends we test them with a known combustible gas and
24 make sure you get a reading. We've actually contacted the factory
25 and asked them, and they recommend actually using a Bic lighter,

1 unlit, to detect combustible gas before using it.

2 Q. Who conducts these tests on this equipment?

3 A. It would be the service tech.

4 Q. The service tech?

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. Are there records on when such tests are conducted?

7 A. No. Any tool you use you want to make sure it's working when
8 you're using it.

9 Q. All right. Thank you. That's all.

10 MR. CHHATRE: Rachael?

11 MS. GUNARATNAM: No, I'm done.

12 MR. CHHATRE: John?

13 MR. PRICE: Just a couple questions, follow-up.

14 MR. CHHATRE: Identify.

15 BY MR. PRICE:

16 Q. Steve Price. Mr. Neil, when the door shuts to the meter
17 room, to the storage room that we've been talking about at 8701,
18 does it lock automatically?

19 A. I don't think so. I'm not sure, though. I don't know.

20 Q. So you're not familiar with the --

21 A. No.

22 Q. -- lock mechanism on that?

23 A. No.

24 Q. Okay. Are you aware of any attempt in the past for -- of
25 anyone to break into the storage room?

1 A. No.

2 Q. Okay. Thanks.

3 MR. CHHATRE: If not, then I thank you very much for coming.
4 I appreciate all the help.

5 MR. NEIL: All right.

6 MR. CHHATRE: Off the record.

7 (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 Ronald Neil

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.

Karen A. Stockhausen
Transcriber