

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: CHRISTOPHER WOODWARD

NTSB Headquarters
Washington, D.C.

Monday,
August 29, 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].

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

JAMES MAZZULLO, President
Associates Plumbing, Inc.
(On behalf of Mr. Woodward)

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I N T E R V I E W

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2 MR. CHHATRE: Good morning. Today is Monday, August 29th,
3 2016. We are currently at the NTSB headquarters located at 490
4 L'Enfant Plaza East, S.W., Washington, D.C. We are meeting
5 regarding the investigation of explosion of building 8701 Flower
6 Branch Apartments, Silver Spring, Maryland, that occurred on
7 August 10th, 2016. My name is Ravi Chhatre. I'm with National
8 Transpiration Safety Board located in Washington, D.C., and I am
9 Investigator-in-Charge of this accident. The NTSB investigation
10 number for this accident is DCA16FP003.

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

16 Also, I would like to inform Mr. Chris Woodward 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 friend, family member -- or, if you choose, no one at all. Please
20 state for the record your full name, spelling of your name,
21 organization you work for, and your title, business contact
22 information such as mailing address, and whom you have chosen to
23 be present with you during your interview.

24 MR. WOODWARD: Chris Woodward. C H R I S,
25 W O O D W A R D. I am the vice president of Associates Plumbing,

1 Incorporated, located at 9630 Gerwig Lane, Columbia, Maryland,
2 21046. My phone number is [REDACTED]. And I have James
3 Mazzullo, the president of Associates Plumbing, with me.

4 MR. CHHATRE: Thank you. Now, I would like to go around the
5 room and have each person introduce themselves. Please state your
6 name, spelling of your name, your title and the organization that
7 you represent, and your business contact information. Starting
8 from my left.

9 MS. GUNARATNAM: Rachael Gunaratnam. R A C H A E L,
10 G U N A R A T N A M. NTSB Hazmat investigator. [REDACTED]

11 MR. EMEABA: Kalu Kelly Emeaba. K A L U, K E L L Y, E M E A
12 B A. I'm NTSB investigator. My phone number is [REDACTED]

13 MR. PRICE: Steve Price, division head system operations,
14 Washington Gas. [REDACTED] And my email is
15 sprice@washgas.com.

16 MR. AMROLIWALA: My name is Rashmikanth Amroliwala.
17 R A S H M I K A N T, A M R O L I W A L A. Working with state of
18 Maryland Public Service Commission, Pipeline Safety Group. My
19 number is [REDACTED].

20 LT. OLIN: Lieutenant William Olin, fire and explosives
21 investigator Montgomery County, Maryland. Phone number is [REDACTED]
22 [REDACTED]. Email [REDACTED]

23 MR. MAZZULLO: I'm James Mazzullo, president of Associates
24 Plumbing. My email is jim@associatesplumbing. Telephone number
25 [REDACTED].

1 MR. CHHATRE: Thank you.

2 INTERVIEW OF CHRISTOPHER WOODWARD

3 BY MR. CHHATRE:

4 Q. Mr. Woodward, for the record, just tell us your education --
5 formal education, training, work experience. And your current
6 experience with the company.

7 A. Okay. High school diploma. I currently hold a backflow
8 license, journeyman plumbing license and a master gas fitter
9 license. I've been with the company since 1996. And my current
10 title is vice president.

11 Q. And what are your current responsibilities as the vice
12 president?

13 A. Oversee operations. Mainly of new construction and apartment
14 rehabs that we do, also along with the service operations of the
15 company.

16 Q. Okay. So were you involved in the water heater installation
17 and the decision-making process for that installation, at 8701?

18 A. No, sir.

19 Q. Were you involved in the installation or maintenance or
20 repairs in any of the other water heaters in that complex?

21 A. No.

22 Q. Do you oversee the staff that installs water heaters at
23 different locations?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. And what is -- what do you do as -- when you oversee them?

1 A. We have an operations manager that is directly in charge of
2 our field staff, and I deal with him directly.

3 Q. Okay. And who the operations manager would be?

4 A. It's Chris Edwards.

5 Q. Okay. So do you ever go and inspect any installations, like
6 water heaters, to make sure it's done right, before --

7 A. Me personally, no.

8 Q. No. Okay. Would that be Mr. Chris Edwards, then?

9 A. He, along with several other of our plumbing supervisors.

10 Q. Okay. And how do you -- are you running training, your
11 technicians for installation of water heaters?

12 A. No.

13 Q. So who offers the training to the people who install the
14 water heaters in your company?

15 A. James Mazzullo does some in-house training.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. And we also offer classes for our field plumbers to go to.

18 Q. Okay. And formal education or informal classes?

19 A. Informal.

20 Q. Informal.

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. And what -- can you tell me what are the levels of your
23 people who install water heaters? Are they journeyman? Are they
24 just trainee? Or, what are their grades -- their levels?

25 A. Yes. So most of our plumbers journeyman licensed, if not

1 master licensed technicians.

2 Q. Can you walk us through what are the different levels?

3 A. So, yes. So a journeyman plumber has to have at least 4
4 years of plumbing experience.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. Once he holds his journeyman's license for 2 years, he's
7 eligible for his master's license.

8 Q. Okay. Master's. And what kind of license you hold?

9 A. A master gas fitter. A journey plumbing and backflow.

10 Q. Okay. Do you yourself do installation of water heaters at
11 all?

12 A. No.

13 Q. No? Okay. And is your license current?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. And when does it expire?

16 A. I'm not sure, exactly.

17 Q. Okay. Oh, you don't have one with you. Okay. Now, do you
18 -- are you involved in selecting the water heaters that are being
19 installed by your company?

20 A. Rarely I am involved, yes.

21 Q. Okay. Were you involved in selecting of the water heater
22 that was installed in 8701 in 2012?

23 A. No.

24 Q. And how long have you been with the company?

25 A. Since 1996.

1 Q. 1996. Okay. Now, have you heard any problems with this
2 particular model that was installed in 8701?

3 A. No, sir.

4 Q. Is there any -- do you get any literature on the problem
5 water heaters or -- for what should I call is like a persistent
6 problem in certain models of the water heaters?

7 A. No, I am not aware of any problems with certain manufacturers
8 or models of any type.

9 Q. And if there would be any, how would you learn about those?

10 A. We would learn through our supplier through a recall.

11 Q. Okay. And are you familiar with this particular model that
12 was installed in 8701?

13 A. Yes, I am.

14 Q. And to your knowledge, do you know any recalls -- any
15 problems in this particular model?

16 A. No, I do not.

17 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. And that's all I have. Thank you so
18 much.

19 BY MS. GUNARATNAM:

20 Q. You mentioned you have a master gas fitter.

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. What does that license you to do?

23 A. So James Mazzullo holds the current master's for Associates
24 Plumbing. If -- basically, it allows me to work on gas
25 appliances. If Jim -- you know, I'm also able to hold it for the

1 company since it's a master's license if Jim was not available.

2 Q. Okay. So you would work just on the appliances?

3 A. Gas piping, appliances, yes.

4 Q. Yeah. Okay. So anything from --

5 A. All gas equipment, basically.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. And piping.

8 Q. Oh, okay. And that piping -- like, all the piping, even up

9 -- just up to the house, like, where it ends for the house line?

10 A. From the house meter --

11 Q. House meter.

12 A. Yeah. To the fixture.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. To the gas appliance unit.

15 Q. Were you ever called in to do any work at 8701 --

16 A. No.

17 Q. -- for that? No? Okay. You never visited the site?

18 A. No.

19 MS. GUNARATNAM: Okay. That's all I've got for now.

20 MR. WOODWARD: Okay.

21 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

22 MR. EMEABA: I have no questions for you.

23 MR. WOODWARD: Okay.

24 MR. PRICE: This is Steve Price, just to make that clear.

25 MS. GUNARATNAM: Thanks, Steve.

1 BY MR. PRICE:

2 Q. Chris, with respect to the service staff, in your position as
3 VP were you aware of any performance issues with any of the API
4 personnel who were working at Flower Gardens Apartment in the 6
5 months or so prior to this incident?

6 A. No, sir.

7 Q. You were here when we were asking Jim about water heater
8 installation requirements. With respect to the questions about
9 anchoring requirements of a water heater, do you have any
10 information in addition to what Jim offered with regard to his
11 understanding that --

12 A. No. No, I do not.

13 Q. Nothing additional?

14 A. No.

15 MR. PRICE: Okay. That's all I have.

16 BY MR. AMROLIWALA:

17 Q. Rashmikant Amroliwala. You say that you are master gas
18 fitter.

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. So how did you get the certification for the master gas
21 fitter?

22 A. Took an exam.

23 Q. What kind of exam?

24 A. It was a timed exam, and it was approximately 80 questions.

25 Q. Okay. And that exam is for the certification for the

1 customer side gas pipeline; is that correct?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Okay. So normally for the master level operators or any of
4 the operators, do you do any hydration pipeline work also?

5 A. No.

6 MR. AMROLIWALA: Okay. Okay. That was the question.

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I've got nothing.

8 MS. GUNARATNAM: Okay.

9 BY MR. CHHATRE:

10 Q. Just a couple of quick follow-up questions. There is -- did
11 your company receive any complaints from any of your customers in
12 the past 5 years that they are unhappy with the installation, or
13 installation problems, in water heaters?

14 A. Have we received any customer complaints on water heater
15 installs. Is that the question?

16 Q. That is correct.

17 A. Not that I can recall.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. The only complaint that I would be able to honestly say is it
20 would be a time -- a lot of our work is done on a time basis. And
21 if the customer thinks that it might have taken a little too long
22 -- it would just be on time, not installation itself.

23 Q. Okay. I mean, if you were just -- and I realize you would
24 not remember. But if you just go back and maybe check and if you
25 have any, then just send us the information. If you have none, no

1 need to send anything.

2 A. Well --

3 Q. About any complaints in the past about water heater not
4 working properly, not installed properly, it's not heating
5 properly. You know, more like functional aspect of the water
6 heater installation.

7 A. Specific to 8701?

8 Q. No.

9 A. In general?

10 Q. In general, from the commercial water heaters.

11 A. Okay.

12 Q. Commercial water heaters.

13 A. Okay.

14 Q. And a follow-up to that will be any complaints on the Kay
15 Management.

16 A. Okay.

17 Q. If you had any received. And what I'm really interested in
18 is after installation they come back and say, my God, it's not
19 heating properly or we are smelling gas or there is an issue with
20 installation. That's all. I'm not interested getting delayed and
21 you promised us in 8 days and it took you 15 days. I'm not
22 interested in that.

23 A. Okay.

24 Q. Those are the complaints, that's --

25 The last question is, tell me what a journeyman -- how do a

1 person get a journeyman license?

2 A. You need to be in the trade for 4 years, do -- in the
3 plumbing trade for 4 years.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. You are then eligible to take your journeyman test.

6 Q. Exam?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. For people who want a journeyman -- to hire them, how does a
9 person becomes a journeyman? Where does the person gets the
10 experience? You said typically you hire the journeyman license.

11 A. So -- yes. So we strive to hire plumbers with a journeyman
12 license or a master's license.

13 Q. Right.

14 A. If they start out in the plumbing trade with us, they'll work
15 for us for 4 years and then they are eligible to go and take their
16 exam.

17 Q. And what their title or classification at that time will be?
18 If somebody comes in and starts working with you?

19 A. They are an apprentice.

20 Q. Apprentice.

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Okay. Okay. And do the apprentice require any formal
23 education at all, or no?

24 A. It does not require -- there are apprenticeship schools --

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. -- that they -- that are available to them.

2 Q. To them.

3 A. Yes.

4 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. And that's all I have. Thank you so
5 much. If no questions -- thank you so much for coming in.

6 MR. WOODWARD: You're welcome.

7 MR. CHHATRE: And appreciate your help. Off the record.

8 (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 Christopher Woodward

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA16FP003

PLACE: Washington, D.C.

DATE: August 29, 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.

Jane W. Gilliam
Transcriber