

## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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ALABAMA GAS CORPORATION (ALAGASCO) \*

NATURAL GAS LEAK WITH IGNITION \* Docket No.: DCA-14-MP-001

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA \*

DECEMBER 17, 2013 \*

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Interview of: LAKENYA BEND and  
LATONYA HOLMESCharles P. Marks Village  
Birmingham, AlabamaFriday,  
December 20, 2013

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: MATTHEW NICHOLSON  
Investigator-in-Charge

## APPEARANCES:

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Alabama Public Service Commission

DON LUPO, Director  
Mayor's Office of Citizens Assistance  
Birmingham, Alabama

TALANA BROWN, Detective  
Homicide  
Birmingham Police Department

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I N T E R V I E W

1  
2 MR. NICHOLSON: Good afternoon. Today is Friday,  
3 December 20th, 2013. My name is Matthew Nicholson and I am an  
4 investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board in  
5 Washington, D.C. We are currently in Birmingham, Alabama at the  
6 Charles P. Marks Village housing community, part of the Housing  
7 Authority of Birmingham District. We are at the rental office,  
8 investigating the Birmingham, Alabama natural gas leak with  
9 ignition, which occurred on December 17th, 2013. This is case  
10 number DCA-14-MP-001. We are here today to interview  
11 LaKenya Bend.

12 For the record, LaKenya, please state your first name  
13 and last name with spelling.

14 MS. BEND: My first name is LaKenya, L-a-K-e-n-y-a; last  
15 name is Bend, B-e-n-d.

16 MR. NICHOLSON: And if you would, please, state for the  
17 record your title, current employer, business e-mail, and phone  
18 number?

19 MS. BEND: My title is Director of Modernization and  
20 Development. I work for the Housing Authority of the Birmingham  
21 District. My cell phone -- I'm sorry, my office phone number is  
22 **\*\*PII\*\*** My e-mail address: **\*\*PII\*\***

23 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay, terrific.

24 At this time what I'll do is, for each of the people  
25 present for this interview, if you would, state your name with

1 spelling and the agency you represent. I'll begin and we'll move  
2 to my left.

3 My name is Matthew Nicholson, M-a-t-t-h-e-w N-i-c-h-o-  
4 l-s-o-n. I'm an investigator with the NTSB.

5 MS. BROWN: My name is Talana Brown, T-a-l-a-n-a, B-r-o-  
6 w-n. I'm a homicide detective with Birmingham Police Department.

7 MR. LUPO: I'm Don Lupo. It's D-o-n, L-u-p-o. I'm the  
8 director of the Mayor's Office of Citizens Assistance.

9 MR. GALLAGHER: David Gallagher, D-a-v-i-d, G-a-l-l-a-g-  
10 h-e-r, with Alagasco.

11 MR. JONES: Wallace Jones, W-a-l-l-a-c-e, J-o-n-e-s.  
12 I'm the Administrator of Gas Pipeline Safety for the Alabama  
13 Public Service Commission. Business phone is **\*\*PII\*\*** And  
14 business e-mail is **\*\*PII\*\***

15 MR. CHHATRE: I'm Ravi Chhatre. That's R-a-v-i, last  
16 name Chhatre, C-h-h-a-t-r-e. I'm accident investigator with NTSB.  
17 My work phone is **\*\*PII\*\*** E-mail is  
18 Ravindra.Chhatre@ntsb.gov.

19 MR. NICHOLSON: And there's one other person in our  
20 room. Could you please introduce yourself?

21 MS. HOLMES: Latonya Holmes. First name L-a-t-o-n-y-a;  
22 Holmes -- last name, H-o-l-m-e-s.

23 MR. NICHOLSON: And you're also with the Housing  
24 Authority?

25 MS. HOLMES: Yes.

1 INTERVIEW OF LAKENYA BEND and LATONYA HOLMES:

2 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. Well, thanks for taking the time  
3 out today to talk to us, LaKenya. The reason -- the purpose of  
4 this interview is really to understand the Housing Authority's  
5 role --

6 MS. BEND: You realize Ms. Holmes will be doing more  
7 interviewing than I will be, as the property manager.

8 MR. NICHOLSON: And that's fine, if you need to defer to  
9 -- and maybe you should come up to the table, while we're having  
10 that discussion. That's perfectly all right if what we're asking  
11 is more in her field. But really, just to open the discussion,  
12 what we'd like is just for you to maybe explain a little bit about  
13 what the Housing Authority is, what you do for the people who live  
14 here, how people come to live in this community, just some  
15 background on the Housing Authority.

16 MS. BEND: Okay. The Housing Authority of the  
17 Birmingham District is a housing authority agency. We operate  
18 under the umbrella of the Department of Housing and Urban  
19 Development, and we serve the Greater Birmingham District,  
20 including 14 public housing sites in the Birmingham area. Marks  
21 Village is a community that Housing Authority of the Birmingham  
22 District -- it's under the umbrella of the Housing Authority of  
23 the Birmingham District, Marks Village is.

24 MR. NICHOLSON: So when we talk about Marks Village,  
25 this is affordable housing or --

1 MS. BEND: This is a public housing community.

2 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. Now how does -- how do people  
3 come to live here? Or do you have to prove a need or --

4 MS. HOLMES: You would go and apply. You would simply  
5 apply. And in the application process, we verify income,  
6 household composition, and you would have to meet the requirements  
7 in order to become housed.

8 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. And when people are approved to  
9 come live in Marks Village, then are they paying rent, or how does  
10 this --

11 MS. HOLMES: It's -- the income is based -- excuse me,  
12 the rent is based off of 30 percent of their annual income.

13 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay.

14 MS. HOLMES: So -- and we deduct a utility allowance,  
15 which is basically what we have -- or what is determined as  
16 somebody would generally pay in utilities at that particular unit.  
17 And so you might pay rent and you might not pay rent, based on the  
18 calculation.

19 MS. BEND: We have a rent calculation that is utilized  
20 throughout the agency, and that's how the rent is determined. And  
21 that is governed by our ACOB, our governing set of rules which is  
22 approved by HUD. So everybody's rent is calculated the same way,  
23 and it's basically 30 percent of your income.

24 MR. NICHOLSON: But then is -- did you say the -- plus  
25 utility allowance, is that rolled into this monthly, or is it

1     separate?

2                 MS. HOLMES:   It's separate.

3                 MR. NICHOLSON:  So let's talk about the gas because gas  
4     is a concern here.  How is natural gas metered at this property?  
5     Is it metered -- it looks like there's individual meters on a  
6     homes.

7                 MS. HOLMES:   Yeah, individual meters.

8                 MS. BEND:    There are individual meters per apartment,  
9     and the residents pay their gas bill.

10                MR. NICHOLSON:  To you?  Or to --

11                MS. HOLMES:   To the gas company.

12                MS. BEND:    To the gas company

13                MR. NICHOLSON:  To Alagasco, okay.

14                MS. BEND:    Yes.

15                MR. NICHOLSON:  We had seen some piping that someone  
16     explained once was part of a master meter system.  So was there  
17     ever a time when they paid directly to you?  No?

18                MS. HOLMES:   I would not know that.

19                MS. BEND:    I'm not aware of that.

20                MR. NICHOLSON:  Before your time.

21                MS. BEND:    Yeah.

22                MR. NICHOLSON:  Okay.  So as far as maintenance, it  
23     sounds like if they need work done internal to the residence in  
24     Marks Village, is that something that's done by Housing Authority?

25                MS. HOLMES:   That's correct.



1           MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. And what kind of work would that  
2 include?

3           MS. HOLMES: General maintenance, upkeep of the units.

4           MR. NICHOLSON: So if they had issues with natural gas  
5 or plumbing, are those maintenance items you would take on?

6           MS. HOLMES: In reference to gas, they have a hot water  
7 heater and a furnace.

8           MR. NICHOLSON: Right.

9           MS. HOLMES: So yes, those would be.

10          MR. NICHOLSON: That's work you would -- and do you  
11 contract that out or do you have your own maintenance crew?

12          MS. HOLMES: We have maintenance. However, if it's  
13 something that we feel a contractor needs to address, we refer it  
14 to them.

15          MR. NICHOLSON: Oh, okay. That would include drain  
16 piping, you would do work -- sewer work, as well? Or plumbing  
17 work, internal?

18          MS. HOLMES: Internal plumbing work, some we do; some it  
19 would be contracted out.

20          MR. NICHOLSON: Contracted out. Okay. The service  
21 lines running to the properties from the cast-iron mains, is that  
22 work that would have been done under the Housing Authority? Plumb  
23 those in?

24          MS. HOLMES: Not to my knowledge, but I'm not sure.

25          MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. Pre-dates your time?

1 MS. HOLMES: Um-hum.

2 MR. NICHOLSON: If there's a call out -- if a resident  
3 here smells or suspects a leak, do they notify you? Is that a  
4 call you receive, ever?

5 MS. HOLMES: I have not received a call since I've been  
6 on the property.

7 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. So you think their calls are  
8 going directly to Alagasco?

9 MS. HOLMES: Um-hum.

10 MS. BEND: And I think a further clarification of that  
11 is if someone called Alagasco, they don't necessarily have to tell  
12 the property manager that they called Alagasco. If it's a problem  
13 that a resident calls in, we document all of our work orders that  
14 we receive and those work orders -- we have a record of, you know,  
15 every work order that has been called in related to gas or water  
16 or sewer or whatever it is.

17 MS. HOLMES: Any service call, um-hum.

18 MR. NICHOLSON: Does that include -- if the city has to  
19 come into Marks Village to do repair of a water main or something,  
20 do they notify you first, or do they just show up and start  
21 digging?

22 MS. HOLMES: Typically, they'll stop by the office.

23 MR. NICHOLSON: That's not going to convey for the  
24 record, but the facial expression indicated maybe that's not  
25 always the case, right?

1 MS. HOLMES: Yeah, typically they will.

2 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. But you do keep records, you  
3 said, of the maintenance work that is performed?

4 MS. HOLMES: Yes.

5 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. Could you speak at all about -- I  
6 think it was Unit 79 where this explosion occurred. Did you --  
7 was there any maintenance that had occurred in that unit in the  
8 past 6 months?

9 MS. BEND: Any maintenance?

10 MR. NICHOLSON: Any type of internal work?

11 MS. HOLMES: Yeah, we've had maintenance requests from  
12 the unit. The last request I believe I received was in reference  
13 to a roof leak or a suspected roof leak.

14 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. Was that taken care of?

15 MS. HOLMES: Yes.

16 MR. NICHOLSON: So I will ask to the best of your  
17 recollection, there was no issue with their -- we've seen the  
18 little furnace units; they've never contacted you for that?

19 MS. HOLMES: No. No.

20 MR. NICHOLSON: If my -- that furnace unit was not  
21 working and I'm a resident of Marks Village, I would call you?

22 MS. HOLMES: That's correct.

23 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. And the residents here know to do  
24 that?

25 MS. HOLMES: Yes.

1           MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. I'm going to shift gears a little  
2 bit here and talk to you about Alagasco. Is there a relationship  
3 between Alagasco and Marks Village that you're aware of their gas  
4 lines in the area and you know that you're to call Alagasco if  
5 you're -- okay.

6           MS. HOLMES: Yeah, if we for any reason suspect any, you  
7 know, leak or if we smell anything, I would know to call Alagasco  
8 and would make that call.

9           MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. Does Alagasco come on site and do  
10 any kind of training or education or --

11          MS. HOLMES: Not -- I wouldn't be -- I haven't  
12 participated in any.

13          MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. You don't know of any, if they  
14 have. Okay. When they -- if Alagasco comes out to do leak  
15 surveys, do they notify this office first? Or would they?

16          MS. HOLMES: Typically, the leak survey -- no, I haven't  
17 been -- I'm not sure of that, but if somebody is connecting new  
18 service, they'll come in the office and notify us.

19          MR. NICHOLSON: Okay, I think at that point, do you  
20 want --

21          MR. CHHATRE: This is Ravi, for the record. And since<  
22 I guess, initially the intent was not to do joint, but since you  
23 are doing it, for the record can you spell your name, the title,  
24 so the transcriber would know?

25          MR. NICHOLSON: She did that already. If you could do

1 it again.

2 MS. HOLMES: Oh, sure. Latonya, L-a-t-o-n-y-a, Holmes,  
3 H-o-l-m-e-s, property manager for Mark Village apartment complex.

4 MR. CHHATRE: Contact information?

5 MS. HOLMES: \*\* PII \*\* E-mail address is

6 \*\* PII \*\*

7 MR. CHHATRE: And again for the record, how long you  
8 have been with the Housing Authority?

9 MS. HOLMES: April of 2013.

10 MR. CHHATRE: And, Ms. Bend, can you educate me in terms  
11 of how many units you have in this area, how old the structures  
12 are? Either of you.

13 MS. BEND: How many units are at Marks Village?

14 MR. CHHATRE: Yeah, like -- I mean, I'm calling them  
15 units because there is one building and there are, I guess, two  
16 apartments in each. Some of them maybe have four or five. So --

17 MS. BEND: Right. Overall, there's 500 units.

18 MS. HOLMES: 500 units.

19 MR. CHHATRE: 500? When you say units --

20 MS. BEND: 500 individual apartment units.

21 MR. CHHATRE: Yeah, okay, okay. And can you, Ms. Bend,  
22 tell how old because, as I say, new, old -- can you tell us how  
23 old these structures are typically?

24 MS. BEND: According to the records that I reviewed, it  
25 was built in 1952.

1           MR. CHHATRE: And who will have the drawings for the  
2 different buildings? I'm talking about like engineering drawings  
3 in terms of showing the plan, the construction?

4           MS. BEND: We are attempting to locate engineering  
5 plans, if we have any, at our central office which is located at  
6 1826 Third Avenue South.

7           MR. CHHATRE: Okay. And I know we are going back too  
8 far, 1952, but --

9           MS. BEND: So if we have some --

10          MR. CHHATRE: Right. No, I --

11          MS. BEND: -- we'll all be surprised.

12          MR. CHHATRE: Right. No, I mean, the backup plan was --  
13 I mean, when the units were built, the builders -- and in this  
14 case it may be hard -- are required to submit a plan to the city.  
15 Would they have those set of plans?

16          MS. BEND: In 1952?

17          MR. CHHATRE: Yeah. No. Okay.

18          MS. BEND: That pre-dates me.

19          MR. CHHATRE: Okay. All right. So if you guys cannot  
20 dig the plan up, then we really have no plan to work with,  
21 essentially.

22          MS. BEND: I would say there wouldn't be, but some city  
23 research may determine them.

24          MR. CHHATRE: And now, for the record, how long you have  
25 been with --

1 MS. BEND: I have been a Housing Authority employee  
2 since November of 2012, but worked in and around the Housing  
3 Authority as a consultant since 2005.

4 MR. CHHATRE: Now, it's still pretty short period, but  
5 during your tenure for a year, year and a half, as director, do  
6 you recall anybody complaining about a gas odor in the community?  
7 Not necessarily a dwelling, but on the street --

8 MS. BEND: I do not recall, no.

9 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. I accidentally happened to locate a  
10 resident, Felicia Coates (ph.), I believe. And she was close to  
11 the unit that we're working on very close from here. And she said  
12 she had, I guess, talked to Housing Authority about a gas odor and  
13 also complained to Alabama Gas, and people did come in and do some  
14 repair work. So is it possible to have, look at -- since both of  
15 you are fairly new compared to the last 5 years or so, is it  
16 possible to look in your record and see what kind of complaints  
17 are coming from the people? Because that might shed some light.

18 MR. NICHOLSON: Do you track complaints from --

19 MS. BEND: We do. We have work orders and we have  
20 proactively began to pull in all those records that are in our  
21 system, so we do have documentation.

22 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay.

23 MR. CHHATRE: I mean, if you can go back to the  
24 beginning, for the start of 5 years, and if we see too many, then  
25 we can maybe request even it going back a little farther. But at

1    least for the last 5 years.

2                   MS. BEND:   Okay.

3                   MR. CHHATRE:  And when you are doing that, if you can  
4    just sort out any complaints about a gas, particularly.  But we  
5    are interested in just overall complaints, what people are  
6    complaining about.

7                   MS. BEND:  Are you interested, in particular, units 79  
8    and 80, or in the general vicinity?

9                   MR. CHHATRE:  I'm looking for the general vicinity  
10   because --

11                  MS. BEND:  Of 79 and 80?  Okay.

12                  MR. CHHATRE:  Yeah.  We were walking down the street,  
13   people were complaining and said, "Oh, we smell a gas."  I just  
14   want to make sure.

15                  Now, when you say, you know, some work -- some repairs  
16   you guys do with your staff and some is contracted out.  
17   Irrespective, who pays for the repairs?

18                  MS. BEND:  Who pays for them?  The Housing Authority of  
19   the Birmingham District would.

20                  MR. CHHATRE:  They will do it?

21                  MS. BEND:  Um-hum.

22                  MR. CHHATRE:  So do you have any cap on each unit that -  
23   - you know, I mean, one apartment just keeps calling and there are  
24   too many repair work, then is there a cap as to how much you will  
25   spend on that apartment?



1 MS. BEND: No, we are charged with making sure our  
2 apartments are --

3 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Are maintained properly.

4 MS. BEND: -- safe, decent, and affordable and livable.

5 MR. CHHATRE: By the way, the building we looked at  
6 looked very solid construction. I'm going to say that.

7 And is there a distinction as to how many people can  
8 stay in one apartment?

9 MS. BEND: Do you want to address that?

10 MS. HOLMES: Yes. Each house -- when -- each household  
11 is determined based on household composition, so based on how many  
12 people are in your house is how we house you. In the event that  
13 -- if you're living in a unit and it's a three-bedroom and you  
14 have additional children, and you are going to require a bigger  
15 apartment, we'll transfer you to a bigger apartment.

16 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. And if the bigger apartment is not  
17 available, then what happens? I mean, I do not know how much --  
18 what occupancy you have right now. Let's just say you're 100  
19 percent occupied and somebody has another child that pushes them  
20 to a higher population, if you would.

21 MS. HOLMES: We'll possibly look at another site.

22 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. But are they required to move  
23 there? They can say, "Look, we are okay with -- even though we  
24 are crowded, we are okay?"

25 MS. BEND: Our policy is to -- we will overhouse, but we

1 are not to underhouse. So that means if your family composition  
2 -- and correct me if I'm wrong -- if your family composition  
3 changes, you have a new baby, a set of twins, you need more room,  
4 and if you have a two-bedroom and you need to move to a three-  
5 bedroom, we don't have a three-bedroom available and we have a  
6 four-bedroom, we'll move you to a four-bedroom to be more  
7 accommodating, instead of keeping you in a two-bedroom and not be  
8 accommodating.

9 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

10 MS. BEND: Correct. Correct.

11 MR. CHHATRE: Good. That helps.

12 MS. BEND: So that's what I mean when I say overhouse as  
13 opposed to underhouse.

14 MR. CHHATRE: The reason I asked the question because  
15 somebody told us that they are the main occupant in the house that  
16 exploded, and that he was not supposed to stay there or something  
17 like that. That's what I'm really -- that's where I'm coming  
18 from. Have you heard anything about -- like I say, have you heard  
19 any complaints from that apartment, there are too many people  
20 living in -- and I do not know which one. There are two units --

21 MS. HOLMES: Right.

22 MR. CHHATRE: -- 79 and 80, so I'm not sure which one.

23 MS. HOLMES: Right. I haven't received any complaints.  
24 We have to have information on everybody that's living in the  
25 household because the rent is based on your income. So we need

1 income information for everybody and who's in the house to make  
2 sure that you're correctly housed. However, we -- if it's not  
3 reported to us, we wouldn't know.

4 MR. CHHATRE: So I guess just to clarify myself, let's  
5 just say in this particular case, what I understand, a lady was  
6 staying with -- and I don't know exactly how many children and the  
7 family unit there, but what I heard that the boyfriend or the male  
8 occupant was staying there and he should not have been staying  
9 there, or something to that effect. So I'm just saying I don't  
10 know what restrictions you have in terms of can they have a guest  
11 for a while? Is there upper limit on a guest staying?

12 MS. BEND: You may want to explain like -- for a lease  
13 agreement, what it --

14 MS. HOLMES: Yeah, you have a guest, but you can't -- he  
15 will be considered an unauthorized occupant because he was not  
16 listed on the lease. If anybody is living in your household for  
17 over -- more than 14 days, it needs to be reported to the rent  
18 office and they need to, you know, go through the process of being  
19 added on your lease.

20 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. So 14 days is your upper limit.

21 MS. HOLMES: Is the max -- um-hmm.

22 MR. CHHATRE: So up to 14 days, the person doesn't have  
23 to be reported?

24 MS. HOLMES: That's correct.

25 MR. CHHATRE: And if there are more than one, I guess,

1 breadwinner in the house, do you consider total collective income  
2 of husband and wife, for example?

3 MS. HOLMES: We consider income for all adult household  
4 members. All adult household members. And adult is defined by  
5 age, so it would be 19.

6 MR. CHHATRE: Oh, 19, 19 or above.

7 MS. HOLMES: Um-hum.

8 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Was there any repair work done in  
9 the last 5 years -- you will not know 5 years, but maybe if you  
10 can look up the record and get back to us -- in terms of repairs  
11 being done on the gas lines -- main lines, service lines -- in  
12 different complexes. And I'm not really restricting to the nearby  
13 homes, but in the entire complex. I'm just trying to find out how  
14 broad, if there is a problem.

15 MS. BEND: That were completed through Housing  
16 Authority?

17 MR. CHHATRE: Yes. I mean, if you have requested help  
18 from the gas company or the neighborhood people had done it on  
19 their own, but if you have any record of that. We just want to  
20 find out how many times the gas company had to come in to do the  
21 repairs. And would you know what kind of repairs they did, or do  
22 you guys don't keep track of that?

23 MS. HOLMES: If it was a repair that we did, yes.

24 MR. CHHATRE: But you wouldn't be repairing the gas line  
25 in the street?

1 MS. HOLMES: No, no.

2 MR. CHHATRE: No, what I'm saying is if you call for,  
3 let's say, gas odor -- I'm just going to give you an example, not  
4 necessarily it happened. But if you call them and say, "Look, I  
5 was walking on the street to talk to somebody in Apartment 83, and  
6 I smelled gas." Now, if they come in and do any repair at all or  
7 no repair at all because their meter doesn't show anything, would  
8 you know what happened with that particular complaint from the gas  
9 company?

10 MS. HOLMES: No.

11 MS. BEND: Only if the gas company gave some  
12 information, stopped by (indiscernible) --

13 MS. HOLMES: Right.

14 MR. CHHATRE: Okay, but they're not required to do that?

15 MS. HOLMES: Yeah.

16 MR. CHHATRE: So you would not know if the issue is  
17 resolved or not resolved, per se?

18 MS. HOLMES: No. Not unless they come to the office.

19 MR. CHHATRE: I really have these questions -- thank you  
20 so much. I mean, it gives me some information that I really need.

21 MR. GALLAGHER: I'm just -- and this goes back and it  
22 may have been done prior to both of you being here, but in some of  
23 our excavations, we've noticed it looks like water lines have been  
24 recently replaced. Do you know approximately when that work might  
25 have been done? It was probably before y'all?

1 MS. HOLMES: Before, yeah. Um-hum.

2 MR. GALLAGHER: I was just wondering because we've  
3 noticed a lot, it looks like fairly new PVC piping in the ground,  
4 and the lines going from the PVC pipe up to the apartment, when we  
5 were working on it, they looked fairly new, too. So I was just  
6 wondering when it might have been done.

7 There's also -- I've noticed a lot of -- around a lot of  
8 the trees, there's like straw, hay, like somebody's been here  
9 working. Do you know what that was from?

10 MS. HOLMES: Yes. We are inspected -- the property is  
11 inspected and the hay around the trees is because erosion --

12 MS. BEND: It's inspected annually by HUD, which is tied  
13 to our funding.

14 MR. GALLAGHER: Oh, okay.

15 MS. BEND: One of the things we could --

16 MR. GALLAGHER: I understand.

17 MS. BEND: -- be cited for is erosion.

18 MS. HOLMES: Erosion, yeah.

19 MR. GALLAGHER: Okay.

20 MS. BEND: So the hay is planting seed to try to get  
21 grass to grow on the bare areas.

22 MR. GALLAGHER: Well, and the reason I was asking was  
23 because a lot of times when contractors come in and do work, they  
24 have to put the grass seed out and hay on top of it. Okay.

25 MS. BEND: Most of our bare spots are from people

1 walking, not on the sidewalks --

2 MR. GALLAGHER: So this is more beautification than  
3 anything?

4 MS. BEND: -- but the path of least resistance to  
5 building.

6 MR. GALLAGHER: Okay, okay, okay. That explains --

7 MS. BEND: I think we could learn better as engineers to  
8 put the sidewalk where the people walk, not where it looks better,  
9 so --

10 MR. GALLAGHER: That explains that. It's just around a  
11 lot of the trees we've been seeing that and I was wondering if  
12 there had been some kind of excavation activity recently in that  
13 area that we, you know, might not have been able to figure out.

14 MS. HOLMES: No.

15 MS. BEND: No. That's from our REAC inspection.

16 MR. GALLAGHER: Okay. But I would still like to know  
17 when the water lines were put in, because they -- the way they  
18 backfilled it, it just -- you could tell it had been -- something  
19 been done recently.

20 MS. HOLMES: Okay.

21 MR. NICHOLSON: Well, while we're on that, too -- this  
22 is Matt Nicholson -- we've seen -- it looks like the sewer lines  
23 had, I don't know how recently, but had been upgraded from  
24 possibly what they might have prior -- what we've seen might, have  
25 been cast iron and now they're, it looks also like a PVC, in some

1 cases, rerouted and altered. So I don't know, if you're doing a  
2 search for water lines, if you could do the same sort of thing for  
3 the sanitary sewer leaving the house. It looks like there's been  
4 alterations.

5 MS. BEND: Well, we know over the past 10 years -- I  
6 guess you can speak to that, too -- Jefferson County Environmental  
7 Services, with their consent decree, did sewer upgrades all over  
8 the county.

9 MR. NICHOLSON: Oh, okay, good.

10 MS. BEND: So it could very well be a possibility that's  
11 something Jefferson County Environmental Services has done in  
12 their massive, massive work that they did all over the county.

13 MR. JONES: That might be why we looked down in those  
14 manholes and saw the -- like a coating on the inside of those  
15 manholes.

16 MS. BEND: They did a lot of, like, sealants inside  
17 those (indiscernible).

18 MR. NICHOLSON: The inserts, yeah.

19 MS. BEND: Um-hum. Yeah, the --

20 MR. JONES: Well, it wasn't really an insert. It's like  
21 the bricks inside the manholes had some kind of coating, like a --  
22 or a paint on them. Instead of just seeing the actual bricks, you  
23 could -- there was a -- like something to keep -- you know, if the  
24 water got high or to keep the water from seeping out through the  
25 bricks or whatever.



1           MR. LUPO: Matt, this is Don. If they're not able to  
2 get that, I can get it from the county and I can also get it from  
3 the waterworks.

4           MR. NICHOLSON: Well, you're the person.

5           MR. LUPO: I'll be happy to.

6           MR. NICHOLSON: Just -- why don't you take those action  
7 items?

8           MR. LUPO: I'll get those.

9           MR. NICHOLSON: Let's not make these ladies do that.  
10 Okay. I'm sorry, Wallace.

11          MR. JONES: That's fine.

12          MR. LUPO: And going back to the plans, the housing  
13 diagrams, we may have those as early as this afternoon.

14          MR. NICHOLSON: Terrific.

15          MR. CHHATRE: Wonderful.

16          MR. NICHOLSON: Great.

17          MR. CHHATRE: That will save you some hassle and some  
18 time to search for those.

19          MR. NICHOLSON: Well, I would ask, though, while we're  
20 on that subject, do you have -- you have just a generic layout of  
21 what your apartments look like, do you not?

22          MR. BEND: We have a site layout, but it's just the  
23 building locations.

24          MR. NICHOLSON: Oh, and that's just the outline of the  
25 buildings. So you don't have like a floor plan that you show

1 potential -- okay.

2 MS. HOLMES: No.

3 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. All right. Well, then I don't  
4 have a request.

5 MR. CHHATRE: Your turn.

6 MR. GALLAGHER: Okay. David Gallagher, Alagasco. Are  
7 the residents instructed to call maintenance or the rental office  
8 when they have either a gas, electrical, or a water problem?

9 MS. HOLMES: If it's inside the unit, yes.

10 MR. GALLAGHER: Okay. If it's outside the unit, are  
11 they instructed -- if they smell gas or see water leaking, are  
12 they instructed to call the rental office?

13 MS. HOLMES: Well, instructed, I'm not sure. We do --  
14 if there's any concerns, yeah, they'll call the rental office.

15 MR. GALLAGHER: Okay. Is there anything official -- is  
16 there a letter sent out to the residents asking them if they have  
17 a gas problem or a water problem, is there a letter sent to the --  
18 or given to the residents that would require them to report it to  
19 you first?

20 MS. HOLMES: At initial move-in, we explain that if  
21 there is any major water leaks -- but this would be inside their  
22 unit -- to contact the rental office. But outside, no.

23 MR. GALLAGHER: Okay. In that same letter, for gas are  
24 they instructed to let y'all know before they call the gas  
25 company? In that initial meeting with that -- if they smell gas

1 inside their building, are they required to come through you  
2 before they call the gas company?

3 MS. HOLMES: Well, we ask them to call, but it's not  
4 something -- I guess a requirement. But yeah, we tell them any  
5 issues that you have, with your furnace or your --

6 (Outside interruption.)

7 MS. HOLMES: -- with their heater or hot-water heater,  
8 to contact the office.

9 MR. GALLAGHER: Could we get a copy of that letter  
10 that's given at the rental? Okay, if the residents call, who  
11 calls the gas company if they're smelling gas inside the house?  
12 Who would make that call to the gas company?

13 MS. HOLMES: I'm sorry?

14 MR. GALLAGHER: If a resident calls you --

15 MS. HOLMES: Inside the house?

16 MR. GALLAGHER: Inside the house and says, "I smell  
17 gas," and calls you, who calls Alabama Gas?

18 MS. HOLMES: The resident will call, or if I'm notified  
19 by maintenance, I myself will call. I will call.

20 MR. GALLAGHER: Is there anything written in the letter  
21 that asks them to let you call, or y'all just leave it up to --  
22 resident may or may not. If they don't do it, then if you're  
23 aware of it, you do it?

24 MS. HOLMES: Correct.

25 MR. GALLAGHER: On behalf of the customers?

1 MS. HOLMES: That's correct.

2 MR. LUPO: Matt, this is Don again. Going back to one  
3 of the things that I think Ms. Bend said, and the question was  
4 about utilities cutting the streets and doing work. Sometimes  
5 they would not be notified. And they're not notified because  
6 we're not notified. At the end of the month we're notified and  
7 they're given like permits in arrears for cutting the streets. So  
8 but we can go back and pull permits for as far back as you want to  
9 go, but a lot of times something may be cut and repaired on the  
10 second day of the month, and it'll be 29 days later before we find  
11 out about it.

12 MR. NICHOLSON: Why is that? That's a process that's --  
13 it's intentional that they do their work and then come back later  
14 and ask for a permit?

15 MR. LUPO: I think it's to expedite getting the work  
16 done. That's the only thing I can imagine.

17 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. But it does get -- at some point  
18 it does get on record?

19 MR. LUPO: Yeah, at the end of the month, they send  
20 reports and tell us where they cut.

21 MS. BEND: But we don't receive a --

22 MS. HOLMES: No.

23 MS. BEND: -- we don't receive that information.

24 MR. LUPO: Yeah, the city would receive that.

25 MR. NICHOLSON: And a contractor wouldn't necessarily

1 know, driving into this area, that this is a Housing Authority  
2 neighborhood, would they?

3 MS. BEND: I can't answer for the contractor, so I don't  
4 know. But I --

5 MR. NICHOLSON: I mean, there's nothing that was posted  
6 that says "See LaKenya at the office before you dig," or -- okay.

7 Thanks. Anything else?

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Nope.

9 MR. NICHOLSON: No?

10 MR. CHHATRE: I have a couple of follow-up questions.

11 Did Alabama Gas, they would have come to the Housing  
12 Authority and said we want to distribute certain flyers to the  
13 neighbors, or this is our plan, that if you smell a gas, ask your  
14 renters to call us; we will have some drill or some kind of an  
15 educational program or flyers that we'll distribute to the  
16 neighborhood?

17 MS. HOLMES: Not that I'm aware of.

18 MR. CHHATRE: Can you look into your records for the  
19 last 5 years and see if any correspondence came from the gas  
20 company? Did the gas company give you any brochures to distribute  
21 to the renters?

22 MS. HOLMES: No.

23 MR. CHHATRE: Then you can just check that out for the  
24 last 5 years if they did.

25 Now, did the gas company or cable company -- I'm

1 assuming they had a cable -- has any of these company came and  
2 told you guys that since you got to do the repair, that to call  
3 either Miss Utility or One Call, whatever the case may be in the  
4 state, to locate the underground utilities before you dig?

5 MS. HOLMES: Yes. Well, what's the question again?

6 MR. CHHATRE: I guess the question is has any --

7 MS. HOLMES: Do we use line locators prior to --

8 MR. CHHATRE: Yes.

9 MS. HOLMES: Yes.

10 MR. CHHATRE: Or like 811 in some states, and --

11 MS. HOLMES: Yes.

12 MR. CHHATRE: And in your -- and since we don't have a  
13 copy of the instructions, does that include in your letter saying  
14 to renters that "call before you dig" kind of thing?

15 MS. HOLMES: To the residents, no.

16 MR. CHHATRE: No, okay. In --

17 MR. HOLMES: Are your residents allowed to dig?

18 MS. HOLMES: No, they're not.

19 MR. CHHATRE: I only ask because some people told me,  
20 when I was doing this news briefing, when the reporter asked me  
21 and -- you know, again, we don't go by the reporters, but the  
22 reason I'm quoting this, I was told -- or asked, the question was  
23 asked by a reporter, saying people were complaining to her that  
24 sometimes they have to dig and do the repairs. And my comment was  
25 they shouldn't be doing that.

1 MS. HOLMES: No, no.

2 MR. CHHATRE: So that's the reason for the question.

3 MS. HOLMES: No, they wouldn't have any reason to dig.

4 MS. BEND: We are not aware of any residents doing  
5 repairs. We would like to know who they are.

6 MR. CHHATRE: No, I mean, I understand. Okay. I mean,  
7 since we are on the record, I just thought I'd clarify that from  
8 you guys.

9 Now, do you recall in the last year and a half or a few  
10 months -- and if not, can you go back to 5 years -- and can you  
11 tell us if there are any incidents of major or minor -- major or  
12 minor, any gas leak inside the homes that required repair outside?

13 MS. HOLMES: Not since I've been here. Not to my  
14 knowledge.

15 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. That's all I really have.

16 MR. NICHOLSON: Wallace, anything?

17 MR. JONES: No.

18 MR. GALLAGHER: One thing I think y'all were asking  
19 about the education about a gas leak -- I don't remember the exact  
20 question. I think you've been asked to find something. We do  
21 send out in our billing about "if you smell gas," at different  
22 times throughout the year. So you may want to look at some of  
23 that, if you were looking for some information on that. We do  
24 throughout the year send out something in the bill to all the  
25 customers, anybody that receives a gas bill, there's an insert

1 talks about what to do in an emergency if you smell gas. So  
2 that --

3 MR. NICHOLSON: So that would go to each of the renters,  
4 not just their office?

5 MR. GALLAGHER: Right, whoever gets the gas bill would  
6 get that.

7 MR. NICHOLSON: And these units kind of look like  
8 duplex. There's like a unit and unit and they share a wall. They  
9 each have individual addresses, right?

10 MS. HOLMES: Yes.

11 MR. JONES: And individual meters.

12 MR. NICHOLSON: Yeah, I saw that.

13 MR. JONES: Okay.

14 MR. CHHATRE: I've got a similar one. Do you guys  
15 recall receiving anything from Alabama Gas about calling them or  
16 calling 911? I'm sure you get an electric bill for this building,  
17 right?

18 MS. HOLMES: We get gas bills for our vacant units  
19 because we have the service on while we're working in those units,  
20 so --

21 MR. CHHATRE: And do you recall seeing that brochure  
22 that --

23 MS. HOLMES: Yes.

24 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Good.

25 MR. LUPO: And to piggyback on one more question about



1   how many people can live in a unit.  There is a city ordinance  
2   that says X amount of people can live in housing, period; my  
3   house, your house.  They can live in a house and only X amount of  
4   people that are not related to those said people can live in the  
5   house.  I don't know if it governs Housing Authority property.

6           MR. NICHOLSON:  Yeah, I was going to ask.  Since you're  
7   federally funded, in a sense, are you -- do you have to follow  
8   state permits or city --

9           MS. BEND:  We have housing regulations on how many  
10  people can live in a unit.

11          MR. NICHOLSON:  And what would that be for -- what did  
12  you call 79?  It was like -- was it a two bedroom or --

13          MS. HOLMES:  It was a five bedroom.

14          MS. BEND:  It was a five bedroom.

15          MR. NICHOLSON:  Oh, my gosh, it was five bedroom.

16          MS. BEND:  79 and 80 are both -- or were both five-  
17  bedroom units.

18          MR. NICHOLSON:  Okay.  I haven't gone upstairs yet.  
19  There must be four bedrooms upstairs, or maybe one --

20          MS. HOLMES:  Four bedrooms upstairs and there should be  
21  one downstairs.

22          MR. NICHOLSON:  So the occupancy on that would have  
23  been?

24          MS. HOLMES:  Well, with housing, we base it on your  
25  household composition, so it might be -- I'm not sure with the

1 city if it's just two people per bedroom, but we determine it  
2 based on sex and age. And so it's several factors.

3 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay, so it's not that simple.

4 MS. HOLMES: Right. Just -- um-hum.

5 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay, so that would -- that's five-  
6 bedroom unit. Good. Okay.

7 Anything else? Police?

8 MR. CHHATRE: Well, thank you for your time and  
9 educating us. This is really appreciated.

10 MS. HOLMES: Thank you.

11 MS. BEND: Okay. Thank you.

12 MR. NICHOLSON: Going off the record, I guess. Off the  
13 record.

14 (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:           ALABAMA GAS CORPORATION (ALAGASCO)  
                                  NATURAL GAS RELEASE WITH IGNITION  
                                  BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA  
                                  DECEMBER 17, 2013  
                                  Interview of LaKenya Bend and  
                                  Latonya Holmes

DOCKET NUMBER:           DCA-14-MP-001

PLACE:                    Birmingham, Alabama

DATE:                     December 20, 2013

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.

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Cynthia P. Gallagher  
Transcriber