

DCA13MR002
Conrail - Shared Assets
Derailment/Hazardous Material Release
Paulsboro, New Jersey
November 30, 2012

NTSB - Interview of Paulsboro Deputy Fire Chief

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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TRAIN DERAILMENT/CHEMICAL SPILL
NOVEMBER 30, 2012
PAULSBORO, NEW JERSEY

Docket No.: DCA-13-MR-002

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Interview of: GARY STEVENSON

Paulsboro Police Department
Paulsboro, New Jersey

Saturday,
December 1, 2012

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: PAUL STANCIL
Accident Investigator

APPEARANCES:

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** PII **

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I N T E R V I E W

(3:00 p.m.)

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3 MR. STANCIL: Okay. My name is Paul Stancil. I'm a
4 hazardous materials accident investigator with the National
5 Transportation Safety Board. This is December 1st, 2012, it's
6 3:00 p.m., and we are at the headquarters of the Paulsboro, New
7 Jersey, Police Department. With us in the room is Deputy Chief --

8 MR. STEVENSON: Gary Stevenson.

9 MR. STANCIL: -- Gary Stevenson with the Paulsboro Fire
10 Department. Also in the room is Muhamed El-Zoghbi who is also a
11 hazardous materials accident investigator.

INTERVIEW OF GARY STEVENSON

12
13 BY MR. STANCIL:

14 Q. Deputy Chief Stevenson, we'd like you to provide us an
15 overview in as much detail as you can possibly give us as to what
16 occurred yesterday with the respect to the train derailment in
17 Paulsboro.

18 A. Okay. I was in bed. I was awake, getting ready to get
19 up, but I was in bed. And my house shook violently; I heard
20 something like crash, and my house shook violently. I mean, it
21 swayed big time.

22 Then my wife let out a big scream from downstairs saying
23 Gary, hurry up, and get down here for God's sake, the train's just
24 derailed. I think one of them, I thought she said one of them
25 exploded. Hurry up and get down here. She started, you know,

1 being really upset, get down here, get down here.

2 At the minute I felt the house shake before even she
3 said the train derailed, that's exactly what I thought. I thought
4 the train derailed because we've been having discussions about
5 problems over there with the trains.

6 I, obviously, threw my cloths on. When I got
7 downstairs, and I originally thought it was the engines probably
8 went in. I grabbed my fire radio just by instinct, my fire
9 chief's radio by instinct. I looked out and then I saw what we
10 all see over the creek. Well, I immediately called county and
11 told them what was going on, what I saw. Over the chief's radio,
12 I said I can see a placard number 1086, and I couldn't get out to
13 my garage to get my fire gear at the time because too many things
14 were going on.

15 I told county dispatch, 9-1-1 center, what is 1086. I
16 worked in refinery for years, 30 years, so I kind of know about
17 chemicals. And they told me it was the vinyl, stabilized vinyl
18 chloride. I'm like okay that's -- I don't know the reaction of it
19 in water.

20 So the police were starting to show up about that time,
21 but what I witnessed first was no fire or anything. The tank car
22 had apparently already bled really quick because I really
23 didn't see anything pouring out of the ruptured tank car. But
24 there was this big white thick haze on the creek.

25 Now, that's no different than -- I've lived there for

1 years -- of seeing a fog. It's at the same -- we've seen the fog
2 roll off the creek, but it was odd for this time of year.

3 I was kind of looking for my wife, and I'm not sure
4 where she was at the time because I wanted to ask her was this fog
5 here or was it clear and then the train happened, accident.

6 I finally found her. I guess she was inside calling
7 people, I'm not sure, calling my dad maybe to warn him. You know,
8 my dad's house is right across the street.

9 And she says no, that was not there. And I'm like, oh,
10 wow, because it just spread (makes noise). But it was all low at
11 the time. Now, we're 18 feet above sea level, I am. So I'm
12 thinking okay, I'm okay. I got my homeowner's hat on, I've got my
13 fire chief's hat on, I've got my -- I'm councilman, but I'm head
14 of public safety. Okay. What do I need to do for all three of
15 these things?

16 Fire chief, I'm doing my fire chief stuff; public
17 safety, trying to alert people; you got kids going to school --
18 the police had pulled up and I had a discussion with one of the
19 cops, and I really don't know who it is to this day, about the
20 school, kids walking to school.

21 By then I think my fire chief, Al Giampola, might have
22 been arriving on scene. All of a sudden, we get blanketed, it
23 just lifted. I mean, like the fog.

24 Now, I'm arguing with fire chiefs and police department
25 people and Valero people who showed up on the scene. We're

1 talking 15, 20 minutes into the job now, okay, it's all lifted. I
2 couldn't see neither one of you 3 feet away from me, okay, that's
3 how thick it was. You could have been right here and I couldn't
4 have seen you 1 feet away.

5 No, I didn't detect no breathing problems on me or with
6 anybody that was there. The police were saying, no, that was a
7 fog, that was a fog. I'm like my wife said it wasn't here. The
8 fog -- it was a crystal clear day, crystal clear on the water. So
9 I'm trying to gauge here the PD saying, oh, no, this is a fog.
10 I'm saying no; my wife's saying no, it isn't. So there went the
11 argument discussion about whether this was a fog or this was from
12 the release.

13 So anyway, we started telling them to close schools and
14 all. We're actually standing in it the whole time, the whole -- I
15 went in the house a few times, in and out maybe to go to the
16 bathroom, I don't know. And probably these red eyes that you see,
17 and they were worse this morning, are from standing in it for well
18 over an hour. And then it just started -- I don't know if the
19 wind came up, but it just shifted from us and we became clear.

20 But I immediately called in. I knew immediately what it
21 was because I asked for the -- I could see the one placard number.
22 Now, that was only telling me what the one car was ruptured.

23 I should back up a little bit. I said I need that train
24 guy here immediately with his, what do you call, a concept --

25 MR. EL-ZOGHBI: A consist?

1 THE WITNESS: A consist. What are these trains
2 carrying, because three of them, two of them I could not identify.
3 I walked around my house and saw that two of them were on my lot
4 and saw the plastic pellets or whatever it is. And then the other
5 one, it's just, of course, just lumber.

6 But other than that, I didn't see no fire, no smoke
7 other than that white haze that became, really, it was thick on
8 the creek and became a lot thicker when she lifted during that,
9 and that was a good 20 minutes that you and I would not be able to
10 see each other, and I was standing in it the whole time to answer
11 your question.

12 That was -- and then we moved the command center to the
13 St. James Church right on the corner. You know, we got out of it
14 -- by the time we got out from the big meeting, it was gone. And
15 I radioed into the chief, I said, chief, it's lifted; it's out of
16 here. I think it just drifted across town so then we could see
17 everything crystal clear.

18 Nobody that came on location saw it crystal clear like
19 me and my wife because by the time they got there, it was all
20 covered, the haze had lifted and it was -- I couldn't explain to
21 them.

22 They came in, the police department came into my house
23 and saw my -- I took the pictures from the -- my wife took
24 pictures and saw it on my computer. And they go, oh, my God,
25 because you could not even, like I said, you couldn't see 1 foot

1 in front of you much less see what was going on over there.

2 And then pretty much -- and then from then it just
3 became people just showing up, Conrail people. But I have no idea
4 -- the train guy came back once with it and disappeared and I
5 don't know where he went, okay. County did give us a -- its
6 flammability and the whole thing. They did advise us, you know,
7 reactivity, flammability, corrosiveness, blah, blah, blah, where
8 they stood in all the thing there.

9 But our biggest concern was, as my concern was, I could
10 identify the one, what were the other three? Okay. And also,
11 there's no way we knew whether those other three were leaking into
12 the creek because they were driven into the mud, whatever.

13 Finally, we were told it was denatured alcohol was the
14 first car and then it was stabilized chloride the next five or six
15 of which three of the five or six were in the water.

16 I don't know, that's pretty much what I, my wife will
17 tell you what she saw because she says she saw exactly which one
18 derailed first.

19 BY MR. STANCIL:

20 Q. After this occurred, did you put on your hat as the
21 assistant chief? Did you have anything to do with the response?

22 A. Yes, because there's nothing more I could for the house.

23 Emergency management came on scene so they took the
24 emphasis of what was going on in town; locking down the schools,
25 keeping the shelter in place. That was being announced maybe over

1 the loudspeaker here, but OEM 17, Glen Roemmich, started handling
2 that with the police chief actually and the captain of the police
3 department, I believe, as far as locking people, getting people
4 off the streets and ya-dah, ya-dah.

5 I don't know really where it went from that point
6 because that wasn't mine. They filled me in as public safety
7 director, as councilman, but really I was wearing the hats of
8 operations chief because Alfonso Giampola, the fire chief, now
9 assumes as incident command. And anybody, if you know the command
10 system, he goes somewhere else and that's where he is. And I
11 handled all the operations, what trucks I wanted where, what the
12 -- and stuff for that. You know, so --

13 Q. What about hazmat response, did that come through your
14 department?

15 A. We somewhere along the line toned out for the -- well,
16 I'm sorry, we called Valero first -- I'm sorry, Paulsboro
17 Refining, whatever they're called this week, and had their
18 representative, Pat Robinson, come out. And I've known Pat for
19 many, many years, and we trust their judgment on what they had.
20 And they brought their meters, their guy. They were metering all
21 around the site, maybe offsite somewhere in the town, I don't know
22 that. But Pat was kind of giving us directive because he's one of
23 the brightest fire chiefs as far as the refinery, so he knows all
24 about chemicals very much.

25 So he was giving us guidance and then we were also in

1 the meantime had our county hazmat team dispatched for them to
2 show up to our location. We were getting hazmat advice right away
3 because Pat was there really quick. And then the CBRNE team came
4 as well.

5 What they do, I believe, is they send two of their
6 representatives first. They don't go to a fire truck or anywhere.
7 They got -- they're local firemen in different towns that make up
8 the CBRNE. You know, it's not just -- they're not just housed
9 somewhere, you know, waiting for a call, not like a fire
10 department.

11 A couple of their representatives came and we talked to
12 them. And it became a big discussion, why are we in this cloud?
13 And that's when it centered on a discussion oh, it's fog; no, it's
14 not fog; oh, it's part fog and part release; no, it's all release.
15 And it kept going back and forth basically with my fire chief, I
16 believe one of the police department people, I'm telling what my
17 wife said that there was absolutely no fog and it was instant fog
18 when the train wreck happened. So it's not like a gradual fog
19 built up, it happened instantaneously.

20 Q. What sort of advice were you getting from the fire chief
21 from Valero or the other --

22 A. Pat was saying we should move our -- move, get out of
23 this, because we don't know really what the release was. Remember
24 at the time when Pat showed up, you could not see the rail cars.

25 So Pat, you know, the whole word was that it was to

1 stabilize vinyl chloride, but nobody really knew for sure if that
2 was the only thing that was being released. So Pat's saying no,
3 they're getting readings -- you know, the LEL wasn't high at the
4 time. And I don't have those readings so I can't give them to
5 you, but -- you know, the oxygen level, whatever they were reading
6 on their meters.

7 I don't know if they had a -- they had some meter, but
8 it wasn't any one that reads strictly vinyl chloride, which came
9 later down the road, okay. So, Pat might have been giving us LEL
10 readings, but I think Pat suggested that we move here.

11 And then somebody showed up who said we're too ****
12 close, let's move a -- we should be, and somehow they were able to
13 figure that, correctly, you should be at least a mile and a half
14 away from this not 100 yards or in the middle of it.

15 I don't know who came with that information; it might
16 have been a Conrail guy or something. I'm not sure who came with
17 that information. Conrail people were there relatively quickly as
18 well. But we should have been a mile and a half away, even
19 St. James Church wasn't sufficing.

20 What changed everybody's mind on that was when I went
21 outside and said, oh, it's clear, and everybody said oh, we're
22 fine now. They were still taking readings, but I don't know who
23 was getting what because I don't think we had an actual vinyl
24 chloride meter at that early stage. But Pat Robinson would be the
25 guy to ask the question about that because we don't -- on the fire

1 department, we just have our regular gas meters for CO and stuff.

2 So we didn't have any of that equipment whatsoever. Pat
3 had all his guys, a bunch -- there was at least a half a dozen
4 with meters, metering the whole thing down on the water, up at my
5 house, out on the main Commerce Street, where else, I don't know.
6 But he had a bunch of guys taking readings and confirming with my
7 fire chief.

8 In the meantime, I'm just thinking where am I going to
9 put trucks if this thing does start to burn, go, where I'm going
10 to put my fire trucks, you know, which way is the wind blowing.
11 So I'm in fire chief mode myself, but I'm just handling operations
12 for what was going on and what may go on.

13 But as far as where all these readings were going, and I
14 was hearing all kinds of different readings from people, you know,
15 so confusion, yeah, confusion on who was -- what meter was reading
16 what and how was that helping or hurting us.

17 BY MR. ZOGHBI:

18 Q. For the discussion about the command post at St. James,
19 I know you mentioned that the police, fire and OEM were involved
20 in that. Who is the party member, I guess, on each side, I
21 mean --

22 A. Oh, you mean -- we actually went in there two times. We
23 had a huge meeting a little -- I'm trying to get you a time frame
24 here. We went to St. James Church, I'm going to say, a good half
25 hour to 45 minutes after the initial, okay, we went into there --

1 well, they were waiting for somebody to bring a key, too. So we
2 went in there, we had a little meeting to discuss what was going
3 on.

4 Then like I said, I think that's when I went out and
5 said it lifted. Because that -- the hour time frame would have
6 been about right. It hung over my house and us for an hour.

7 And then we had a huge meeting and that included
8 Assembly Member Burzichelli; all the Conrail people were there by
9 this time. You name it, they were there at this time. The hazmat
10 team was there. The room was filled, the room was filled
11 everybody offering their opinions. And the biggest discussion
12 was, well, why isn't the command post either out at the fire
13 station, borough hall or somewhere farther away? That was the
14 biggest discussion, one of them in the meeting.

15 After the Conrail people said this is what leaked out,
16 people said this is what my readings -- Pat Robinson actually led
17 that meeting.

18 BY MR. STANCIL:

19 Q. How would we get a hold of Pat Robinson?

20 A. Contact Paulsboro Refining Company. Okay? It used to
21 be old Valero, it used to be the old Mobil refinery. And he's
22 their head -- I believe he's their head fire chief, but I don't
23 know, or head of safety. I'm not sure his exact term. Al
24 Giampola, the fire chief, may as well have his phone number, okay.
25 I had it when I was fire chief. I don't have it anymore, but

1 that's the way to get a hold of him, call there.

2 Q. What other fire departments were involved in the first
3 response?

4 A. The first response was just Paulsboro, yes. We
5 responded with one engine and I think our rescue vehicle might
6 have come. County 9-1-1 center can give you that information,
7 times and everything, dispatch times and everything.

8 And that's really all we needed at the time. Gibbstown
9 and East Greenwich were added, but this wasn't right away. No, it
10 was just Paulsboro at the time. We were the only fire company
11 that I know of that was -- and there wasn't much for us to do, to
12 be honest with you, on the fire department end. We were kind of
13 waiting for advice on did they want us flowing water on this
14 thing, the knock down.

15 But you would see nothing spewing from it at all. There
16 were no vapors coming from that, from the tank cars at all, to be
17 honest with you. You saw nothing coming up, bubbling, spewing,
18 vapor, nothing, nothing at all.

19 Right around that time, Miller Environmental was called.
20 Somewhere in that time -- I'm sorry -- Miller Environmental was
21 called to boom, but I did not make that call. OEM, our fire
22 chief, I don't know who made that call, but they showed up and
23 they boomed both sides of the bridge.

24 Q. Did you see any product in the water?

25 A. Only a sheen that looked like oil. Now, I know there

1 are hydraulic oils on that bridge because hydraulics make it work
2 and all that stuff. Not a whole lot. I just saw a thin sheen,
3 nothing thick. The only thing I noticed on my whole property was
4 a bunch of insulation that -- when the tank blew, it's got, I
5 guess, a tank, or I'm sorry, metal, metal and then inside is pink
6 insulation, all that was all over my yard. But as far as anything
7 in the water other than maybe a little piece of insulation, no,
8 other than that little sheen. That's all I saw.

9 On the cars -- and they broke off at times, it was like
10 frozen -- it looked like ice, and then it would eventually break
11 off of whatever it was attached to. And you'd see a piece of that
12 floating down for a little, but no big ices or anything like that.

13 Q. Any other fire departments on follow-up?

14 A. Just Gibbstown and East Greenwich. Last night, I had a
15 West Deptford fire company in to assist us putting water onto that
16 thing. My engine was getting hot and needed fuel so they came in
17 for about 2 hours.

18 And basically during all last night, I headed up
19 operations from 5:00 p.m. until 7:00 a.m. Every hour and a half,
20 and I have all those times logged, I sent three/four firemen in
21 SCBAs -- I should back up.

22 Around 5:00 p.m., it was decided to throw that water
23 onto the tank, and that was -- I headed up that operation. Then
24 we put one engine down there right at the bridge to reach the
25 tank. And about another, I don't know, 200 yards up was another

1 truck that was relaying water that was out from the truck that was
2 out on the Commerce Street. So we had three trucks in service
3 because the hydrants were a long ways a way.

4 We kept that up until 9:30, at which time we decided to
5 get the truck -- well, the truck was overheating for one thing; it
6 was just too much for that truck to run all those hours.

7 We ended up putting a portable monitor and just ran a
8 hose to it with one truck that was way out on the Commerce Street
9 and that just, and it knocked all our manpower down. We got rid
10 of all our manpower and just left two guys with an engine and me
11 in operations all night. We just flopped those two guys in and
12 out with other people during the night.

13 Q. So what was the story with your house?

14 A. Today?

15 Q. Yeah.

16 A. I was at work running funerals today, and she called me
17 upset and that, well actually, it started with my mother.

18 My mother was in her house. Are you familiar, have you
19 been down there? Okay, so you know where my mom's house and my
20 big house is in relationship.

21 I said I can't believe mom's in the house. I said are
22 you sure she's supposed be there. She said yeah, nobody was there
23 to stop her from going into her house. Well, I said it doesn't
24 mean she's allowed in it; they're just all at a big meeting at
25 that time, 10:00 in the morning I think it was.

1 And my wife called me up later crying that our house has
2 been, it's like, she used the word contaminated really bad. A
3 doctor of toxicology, one Conrail guy or somebody and a guy with a
4 meter was in our house, and our house is at least five times the
5 maximum limit of what is allowed. And no one should be in our
6 house because you would either be sick or dead within a certain
7 amount of time. And she couldn't remember all of this because
8 she's just too upset.

9 She was told to gather a few things. She was escorted,
10 you have like a couple of minutes to get what you really need and
11 get out, because some of this stuff in this house is contaminated
12 or maybe a lot of the stuff in the house is contaminated.

13 Now, I wasn't sure whether she was talking about just
14 air quality, or was she talking about the kitchen counter has
15 residue all over of it. So I haven't been to the house, I came
16 right here after the funeral after I got the phone call. So we
17 were told that long term, whatever long term means, we would not
18 be back in our house.

19 My mother, by the way, was told -- somebody did come
20 over, they tested her house, she was one times the maximum limit.

21 I believe what happened was we have big screen sliding
22 doors out on our deck. When that happened, I went out that screen
23 door, and it was wide open the whole time. And probably, yeah,
24 the front door wouldn't have mattered because it still got a glass
25 screen door, but that screen was open probably because I kept

1 running in and out. I came in to get binoculars, they weren't
2 good enough, got another pair of binoculars to do the placard
3 thing.

4 I'm sure that just drifted in the, when it came, it
5 might have been coming up at the, when I thought it wasn't, but
6 the whole house probably got enveloped with it.

7 But anyway, that's what we were told today and that's
8 what I'm working on. I want to meet with someone from Conrail and
9 whoever, the doctor of toxicology and say what did you really tell
10 her, what was a long term, is my house condemned? Is it so bad
11 that the furniture has now absorbed all this stuff? And I have
12 grandchildren, you know, that's what I want to find out, I want to
13 find out from them.

14 I guess I have some 30 some years in refinery. I know a
15 little bit about chemicals. Tell me what you told her so she
16 might have read something wrong that you said, or if our house is
17 that bad then what are we going to do about it? So, and what
18 about the ground? What happened if that stuff settled or moved
19 across my land, because I'm up above so it had to come off the
20 creek and come right into my land. What's my land?

21 You know, I tried to read up on vinyl chloride some, but
22 I'd rather have the experts. During -- by the way during late in
23 the afternoon, we had the guys come down -- they were very good
24 with me -- the people that own that tank car where the stuff is
25 going. He gave me a really broad detail. The name was Mike and I

1 don't have his last name. I have his card but not with me.

2 Q. Was it at Occidental Chemical?

3 A. Yeah, uh-huh. He gave me a good thing what it was,
4 because I talked to him about can you come to my next council
5 meeting because I guarantee Tuesday night there will be people in
6 here, and explain from an expert standpoint what vinyl chloride
7 is, what does it mean when it stabilized, which I find out has
8 phenyl in it. The residents need to know is there long term.

9 Hell, I sat in it for an hour. You can hear probably
10 kind of my voice, you see my eyes are blood red. And they want me
11 to, by the way, be over there at the county to take a piss test.
12 And I guess they want my wife too. So that's what the house thing
13 was -- that's what was all about going on with the house today.

14 So I'm want to find out what is long term, do I just
15 need to ventilate my house, you know, with the fire fans, the fire
16 department fans, and just blow to get fresh air moving, or is --
17 for a day and a half, everything has been buttoned up, obviously,
18 the heater was on. Everything's just sitting in there for a whole
19 -- now it's almost 2 days, going on 2 days, just sitting in there.
20 So what effect does it have on everything I have in my house?

21 I mean, I say that because at the hospital, all those
22 22 people that went up, they all -- it's on TV; I saw the
23 contaminated toxic clothing or something. They all labeled those
24 bags, their clothing that way. It was sitting outside the
25 Underwood Hospital.

1 So, I don't know, these are questions I have, so -- and
2 you're not going to answer them, so --

3 Q. But I'd like to.

4 A. But anyway, that's what went on. I did -- so you know
5 when I first came here yesterday, they had the big briefing; I
6 don't know if you were here yet. You had girl here and a guy came
7 in. I don't know who the girl was. I pulled her aside, I said
8 look, actually, the FBI -- the guy I think from federal something
9 was down my lot. I said on Wednesday night, me and my wife heard
10 a loud explosion enough to rock my house big time. It woke me up
11 from a dead sleep on the couch.

12 We both -- she says, God, what do you think? I said
13 that was an explosion. I got out and looked at the refinery --
14 no, I said, or a train derailed, I said. And I went outside,
15 didn't see anything burning at the refinery, didn't see any train.
16 So I'm like what the hell was that?

17 I mean, the first thing I looked to was the train.
18 That's what my instinct told me it was, and I thought the way the
19 house shook and where it came from, I thought something happened
20 on the train bridge. Now, I immediately got up, looked over
21 there, didn't see nobody, nothing. I'm like, **** that was an
22 earthquake or something. It was around 8:30 at night. But me and
23 my wife both felt it. Our house literally shook.

24 I told that girl that and the FBI guy said may --
25 nothing, it may have been anything. Maybe somebody set off a -- I

1 can tell guns. This was an explosion. It went boom just like
2 that, my house shook, literally shook. Not as bad as when it
3 derailed, but it shook. We looked outside, we didn't see nothing
4 at all.

5 (Phone ringing.)

6 MR. STEVENSON: I'm not here. I've answered too many
7 phones today. Is that your phone, I hope? No?

8 I know that's nothing to do with you, you guys are
9 hazmat people, but just to let you know, I did let that girl know
10 that.

11 MR. STANCIL: Why don't you take that call?

12 MR. STEVENSON: I'm going to call her real quick by the
13 way. Are you going to stop your tape or?

14 MR. STANCIL: Well --

15 MR. STEVENSON: Are you done?

16 BY MR. STANCIL: Just one last question then we'll go
17 ahead and we'll stop the tape.

18 MR. STEVENSON: Do you want me to call her, or do you
19 want to ask first?

20 MR. STANCIL: Let --

21 MR. ELZOGHBI: Just a few questions.

22 MR. STANCIL: Yeah, just a few questions and we'll
23 finish this up.

24 MR. STEVENSON: Okay, about calling her; yes/no?

25 MR. STANCIL: Yeah, after.

1 MR. STEVENSON: After? Okay.

2 BY MR. STANCIL:

3 Q. Who made the evacuation decisions for the neighborhoods?

4 A. You mean, there was no evacuation early morning. Are
5 you talking about the actual evacuations?

6 Q. When did --

7 A. What, and this is what I'm not sure about. We were all
8 fine, everybody was good. All the guys down there with meters,
9 and that meant the OCCI guys and other people were down there with
10 meters were all getting very low, not even, you know, readings,
11 whether it be LEL or whatever they were looking for, vinyl
12 chloride. All of a sudden comes a directive from the Coast --
13 (phone ringing) -- I believe it was the Coast Guard. Because I
14 came into this meeting, there were so many people in this meeting
15 I said I ain't staying in here, I'm out of here. You couldn't
16 even breathe in here.

17 Next thing you know, the Coast Guard -- and this is
18 where I believe it's coming from -- I was in, sitting at the
19 meeting, said by their chart, whatever they were using, X amount
20 of people should be evacuated; we're getting high readings of
21 whatever.

22 We are now up to -- what was once maybe .3 or 4 on the
23 vinyl chloride, there's now reading in some astronomical number
24 they were -- and I said to Jim, I don't know his last name, from
25 the CBRNE team, that's county hazmat, what are you reading? I

1 said nobody's read anything for an hour and a half because I was
2 home. Everybody was confident there was nothing -- all the meters
3 were reading nothing. Where are they getting these high numbers?

4 And they -- no one would say where they came from. They
5 were astronomical. It went from 5 to 50, whatever it was, maybe
6 it was LEL, I don't know. But all these numbers, somebody radioed
7 in we got a bunch of high numbers.

8 And I said Jim, walk from my dock then walk all the way
9 around the train with your meter and go all the way on the other
10 side of the bridge. And he came back and said he didn't get
11 anything high at all. It got, I don't know, maybe .2 to .35 or
12 something. But all of a sudden, here comes the order to do
13 evacuations.

14 So once that lady from the Coast Guard got here, she's
15 like this is what you were doing, we're doing this, this and this.
16 And I'm like everybody's fine; we're fine out there. Where are
17 these high readings coming? I never found out where these high
18 readings came from.

19 So I would look at the Coast Guard people first because
20 there was no talk about any evacuations till the Coast Guard got
21 here. Then all your people showed up on my land, a whole group of
22 you showed up on my land. You started walking up and next thing
23 you know, there was nobody, and the police were knocking on my
24 door saying you, Raelynn, my wife, you need to get out now; you're
25 being mandatory evacuation and my mom and dad as well. Where that

1 came from, I don't know. But I can tell you the Coast Guard had a
2 big say in it for it.

3 What they were starting to get was pockets of LEL that
4 were high. But they would come and go, come and go. And they
5 just said we're going to evacuate this quarter of the town because
6 whatever the Coast Guard's chart said -- that's why they moved the
7 command post, by the way, over into East Greenwich because the
8 Coast Guard said this is where your command post will be, this is
9 your evacuation. It should be .5 and half a mile from this in
10 this direction and all that. So I believe that's where it came
11 from.

12 If you haven't interviewed Al Giampola, the fire chief,
13 I'm sure he can enlighten you more on that.

14 Q. He's been a little busy in the --

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. -- unified command.

17 BY MR. EL-ZOGHBI:

18 Q. Can I ask, what time roughly were you and your family
19 evacuated from the --

20 A. I'll tell you what, I almost know this exactly because I
21 was just setting up that one fire truck, and it was right around
22 5-ish when my wife called me on the cell phone and said, Gary,
23 they're telling me I have to leave. I said you stay right there
24 and I'll be up there.

25 And I never -- she was already gone when I finished

1 setting up that fire truck. The police told her you have to get
2 out now by orders.

3 Q. Is that the first notice of a mandatory evacuation --

4 A. Evacuation, yes.

5 Q. -- of that sector?

6 A. Yes. Because that's when I came up, right, to see her
7 and all I saw was all your guys there one second along with other
8 -- we had a bunch of other people down on the docks. The Miller
9 Environmental folk people, he was told to get out of the water.
10 And before you know it, the place was a ghost town; it was
11 completely empty within 5 minutes. And I didn't see your guys at
12 all. All your people were gone. So, obviously, that's when the
13 evacuation order started.

14 I think it expanded more into the town after that, but
15 that -- the original started right about that time right there.
16 And that's when they told us doing the fire operation -- because
17 we didn't have no mask on or nothing. I mean, there was nothing.
18 We were getting nothing on our readings.

19 Anybody that's operating those fire trucks has to be in
20 SCBA. That's when we started donning all our masks. That was
21 really the first time anybody started wearing SCBAs.

22 MR. STANCIL: During the fogging operation, the
23 monitoring --

24 MR. STEVENSON: The monitoring, yeah. During the whole
25 bleve of the tank, whatever you want to call it, not one person

1 had a mask on, respirator on, nothing nowhere, that includes me.

2 MR. EL-ZOGHBI: For the fire personnel, did they end up
3 approaching the tank cars at all? Did you have any --

4 MR. STEVENSON: No. I mean, Conrail had guys and I got
5 pictures of it, literally standing on top of that tank car that
6 morning, three or four guys literally standing over, on the broken
7 car with nothing on. So we're saying, you know what, they're over
8 top of it, they're fine so we're good.

9 And like I said, nobody down there had breathing
10 problems, coughing. There was not one incident I'm aware of
11 anybody saying you know, I'm starting to feel ill, nothing.

12 And that's what threw me off about the evacuations.
13 What the heck all of a sudden spurned all these evacuations
14 because all of us firemen and OEM 17, Glenn Roemmich, looked at
15 each other and went, and he was in my house at the time, what the
16 hell, why are we evacuating, what the hell's going on here?

17 And that was not long after the meeting because me and
18 him left together when the Coast Guard took over.

19 MR. STANCIL: All right?

20 MR. EL-ZOGHBI: Uh-huh.

21 BY MR. STANCIL:

22 Q. Anything else you'd like to add?

23 A. No, just, like the other thing I could tell you would be
24 just train operations, how I thought that the track was
25 deteriorating, but that's for somebody else, I guess.

1 Q. Well, let me ask you this. Over the -- prior to this
2 incident, did you notice anything unusual about the bridge?

3 A. I stood up at a council meeting 6 months ago in that
4 room because we had a guy -- you know, they're building -- I don't
5 know if you're aware they're building a big port down here, a big
6 Paulsboro port?

7 Q. No.

8 A. Yeah, they are. It's going to be like all kind of bulk
9 cargo, and it's going to be locked up and, you know, it's a big
10 port, a big huge port thing.

11 And a guy, a representative was here that heads the port
12 project which encompasses the railroad. And I'm on the record. I
13 hear they were -- I was told there would be three more 100-car
14 trains a day coming through, that means coming by my house.

15 I said those tracks, something's wrong. Every time --
16 the first derailment 3 years ago, I complained. I said when you
17 live there or something and my mother and father have been there
18 for 30 years, you hear noises change. And then every -- before
19 when the train goes over it goes tu-duh, tu-duh, but then it got
20 louder and louder and it was ba-bang, ba-bang.

21 Basically where, let me see if this a track and it's
22 just a swing bridge comes in and meets.

23 Q. Uh-huh.

24 A. Right there. Every time the wheels came across there.
25 And the railroad people say, well -- they gave me some, an answer,

1 basically, that's what it's supposed to do. There's like a
2 bridge, expansion thing. And me and my dad said no, it's gotten
3 louder and louder. And then the first derailment happened.

4 We started, me and my dad talking and, you know, and we
5 seen train guys on the bridge all the time the last month almost
6 every day. Some times for a computer, but they're also down with
7 pry bars. It got louder and louder, ba-bang, ba-bang, ba-bang,
8 derailment.

9 Q. How long before the derailment you saw workers on the
10 bridge?

11 A. That morning, no, I'm sorry, the day before.

12 Q. The day before?

13 A. The day before.

14 Q. What did you see them doing?

15 A. One guy was down there with one of the, they will always
16 take this pry bar and I'm not sure what they were doing, but they,
17 a whole bunch of other guys were always looking over the side.

18 Some times it was computer because a computer wouldn't
19 trigger the bridge to close. They would have to, theoretically,
20 the man would have to get out of the engine, open them, unlock the
21 door, a guy, depending on what side, and trigger something and the
22 bridge would close and you'd get the green light to go. But they
23 were down there every day from almost, months during the summer,
24 and it wasn't all computer.

25 There was something going on with that train bridge and,

1 like I said, me and my father, my dad has lived there since 1950
2 something. He knows the sounds of those trains and those tracks,
3 and ever since they replaced -- I'm sorry, repaired them, they
4 never been right. That's just my -- but it's odd. The noise has
5 got louder, the noise has got louder and each time, it derailed.

6 Do you want me to call her?

7 MR. STANCIL: Yeah. Let's do that now. All right, sir,
8 chief, we're going to stop the recording at this point and thank
9 you very much.

10 (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: TRAIN DERAILMENT/CHEMICAL SPILL
 NOVEMBER 30, 2012
 PAULSBORO, NEW JERSEY
 Interview of Gary Stevenson

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-13-MR-002

PLACE: Paulsboro, New Jersey

DATE: December 1, 2012

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.

Christina H. Neilson
Transcriber