

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

NTSB -Interview of Paulsboro Police Department -Sergeant 205

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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CONRAIL DERAILMENT/HAZARDOUS
MATERIAL RELEASE
PAULSBORO, NEW JERSEY
NOVEMBER 30, 2012

Docket No.: DCA-13-MR-002

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Telephonic Interview of: CHRISTOPHER GILCREST

Friday,
September 6, 2013

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: Muhamed El-Zoghbi
Accident Investigator

APPEARANCES:

MUHAMED EL-ZOGHBI, Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board
490 L'Enfant Plaza East, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20594

I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of Christopher Gilcrest:

By Mr. El-Zoghbi

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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. EL-ZOGHBI: Okay. This is Muhamed El-Zoghbi, a
3 hazard materials accident investigator with the National
4 Transportation Safety Board conducting an interview. This is
5 September 6, 2013. This interview is related to the Paulsboro,
6 New Jersey train derailment that occurred on November 30, 2012.
7 It is a phone interview, and could you please introduce yourself?

8 MR. GILCREST: My name is Chris Gilcrest. I'm a
9 sergeant with the Paulsboro Police Department in Paulsboro, New
10 Jersey.

INTERVIEW OF CHRISTOPHER GILCREST

11
12 BY MR. EL-ZOGHBI:

13 Q. Thank you, Sgt. Gilcrest. What I'm hoping for is for
14 you to basically describe to us today, in your own words in a
15 narrative format, your involvement in the incident -- in the
16 emergency response on November 30th.

17 A. Well, at the time, just before the call, I was just
18 finishing up night work. We work 7 to 7, 12-hour shifts, 7 to 7,
19 and I was just getting done at 7 a.m. at the time the call went
20 out for the train derailment. At that time I went out with
21 Sgt. Grey, soon after the call went out, to assist Sgt. Grey,
22 Patrolman Zubec and Patrolman Richards with handling the
23 derailment. Once we got out there I drove with Sgt. Grey, got to
24 the scene, saw a thick -- looked like smoke around the engine of
25 the train. Thought the train might have been on fire.

1 Once we got out of the car we could sort of smell that
2 it wasn't a burning -- it was a smell I wasn't familiar with but
3 it wasn't something that -- like a burning of a wood or rubber or
4 oil or something. It was some type of chemical smell. At which
5 time I, myself, took a patrol car to the other set of railroad
6 tracks, which was probably around 30 yards away, where I met with
7 another gentleman. I think he was the train conductor. It was a
8 white male. He had like salt and pepper hair with a mustache. I
9 think his last name might have been Mathers or something like
10 that.

11 He was trying to stop traffic from coming towards the
12 train on Mantua Avenue. He walked up to my car. He had papers in
13 his hands. I guess it was transcripts of what trains he had and
14 what was there. He advised me that the mist that we were in and
15 inhaling was a liquified petroleum, at which time, you know, he
16 was pretty shaken, really upset; that his main concern was the
17 chlorine train -- cars, that is, that if one of them had been
18 breached, you know, in his words, he killed people from a mile and
19 a half from here.

20 I directed him to Sgt. Grey, which was back at the
21 engine, to advise him of what, you know, he just told me. I then
22 ran -- walked over or ran over to Guardian Angels Middle School,
23 which is approximately around 30, 40 feet from where I was parked.
24 Made contact with a unknown representative of the school, advised
25 them of the derailment and that they -- they hadn't opened yet.

1 He was going to put out, I guess, like a mass e-mail to all the
2 parents that the school was closed, not to bring the kids to the
3 school.

4 From there, I pretty much was stationary at that one
5 site blocking traffic. Their was -- they're concerned that the
6 liquified petroleum -- what I was told from the conductor, that it
7 is -- it wasn't toxic but it was flammable. We were worried about
8 the train possibly ignite -- or the engine possibly igniting this
9 stuff. We didn't know if it could happen or not. They weren't
10 sure. At which time made the decision to get the engine away from
11 the scene, which was done.

12 Pretty much, once again, we are under the influence
13 that -- or the impression, I'm sorry, that the stuff was liquified
14 petroleum. It was spreading. We were trying to make decisions
15 between myself, Sgt. Grey, Patrolman Richards, Patrolman Zubec on,
16 you know, shelter in place because the mist was spreading farther
17 and farther in towards the center of town, then evacuating.
18 Originally, we were talking -- we were having people evacuate, but
19 as the stuff spread -- as it also was dissipating as it was
20 spreading, we went to shelter in place.

21 Fire personnel showed up. I think the first one I saw
22 was Chief Giampola from the Paulsboro Fire Department. He arrived
23 in his personal vehicle, civilian clothes, speaking with Sgt. Grey
24 over what we had so far.

25 Throughout the rest of the time I was there, again, just

1 under the impression that this was liquified petroleum, a non-
2 toxic substance, just trying to help coordinate with Sgt. Grey
3 setting up perimeters, keeping out that shouldn't be in the area.
4 You know, like I said, I don't think -- I did not find out until
5 quite a few -- quite a bit of time had passed when I had finally
6 found out what the actual chemical was in the air that was in the
7 tank that was breached. And it had to be -- it was quite a bit.
8 It could have been a half hour, 45 minutes later after the fact,
9 that while speaking -- it was myself, Chief Giampola, Assistant
10 Chief Stevenson. There was a gentleman from Valero. I can't
11 think of his name. He was the head of their hazmat group, where
12 they had their emergency -- it's an orange book. I can't think of
13 the name of it right now. It's emergency hazmat material, I
14 guess, identifiers.

15 They were able to finally, once the -- at that time,
16 once the mist had dissipated enough, they would actually be able
17 to see which train was punctured or engine, that is, or car. And
18 once they did that, they looked it up and found out that the car
19 was containing vinyl chloride and that they told -- I was standing
20 right there; we were probably around 30 feet off from the rear of
21 Deputy Chief Stevenson's residence -- that this was, you know,
22 vinyl chloride, that it was a -- I don't know if I say this
23 correctly -- a carcinogen?

24 Q. Correct.

25 A. I didn't know what that meant and I asked them what was

1 that and they told me it was cancerous, which was the first time
2 that I was advised that it was vinyl chloride and/or it was
3 cancerous. By this time the mist had pretty much dissipated I
4 guess because of the air temperature change. It was warmer out.
5 The clouds overhead had dissipated. At which time, from that
6 point on, there was conversations of where to have the, I guess,
7 the base command, where they were going to have the base post.

8 There was an incident where, right after I found out,
9 you know, that -- when we were discussing where to have this post,
10 command post, per se, they were going to have it at this church;
11 Chief Giampola stated that he had someone coming with a key. I
12 told Chief Giampola that it was a Mr. Barry Cordetti (ph.). I had
13 sent him home.

14 Right before I walked up to them when I found out it was
15 vinyl chloride, I was out near Commerce Street and Jefferson, and
16 as cars were coming up and I was calling on the radio to have, you
17 know, have more cars -- I had cars coming towards the scene, to
18 stop it and one of them was Mr. Cordetti. He said that he was
19 told to come there. He had the key to a church, St. James Church.
20 That's where the command post was going to be. I told him, you
21 have to leave; you're not supposed to be here, you know, you
22 shouldn't be here, and I sent him on his way.

23 That's when I walked up back towards Mr. Stevenson's
24 residence where I found out that it was vinyl chloride not
25 liquified petroleum and then, like I said, the conversation of

1 having this command post. He had someone coming with a key and
2 when I said, "No, you don't." I said, "I just sent him home, I
3 didn't want him here. You shouldn't have it this close." And he
4 said, "I'm having it here," and he walked away from me. I guess
5 he made a phone call back to Cordetti because he ended up
6 getting -- I don't know, he ended up getting a key to the church,
7 I guess, like a small hall in the back of the church.

8 Q. Um-hum.

9 A. They opened it up, went inside. I remember everybody
10 introducing themselves. There was a ton of people there. It was
11 from Conrail, the state, Coast Guard, my administration was there,
12 other officers, a ton of people. And I think two minutes into the
13 conversation and everybody introducing themselves, they were
14 getting air readings that were super high. I'm not sure exactly,
15 but were high enough to where we could not have the meeting in
16 this church. So we evacuated the church and they ended up, I
17 think, going to either the station or I think they ended up just
18 going to the fire department where Sgt. Grey had already had an
19 officer set up there at the Paulsboro Fire Hall so any incoming
20 units would go there first and be dispatched from there.

21 I was there until probably around 10:30 or so. At that
22 time everything was pretty much -- as far as the release could be
23 seen, as far as the mist was dissipated. I walked back to the
24 station and went home.

25 Q. Okay. Let's see, I have a couple of questions of

1 clarification.

2 A. Sure.

3 Q. One is related to -- I know -- we listened to the radio
4 transmissions and I think around 7:29, I believe, a.m. you made a
5 radio call stating that the chemical was non-toxic?

6 A. Yeah, that was -- again, I was still under the
7 impression that this was liquified petroleum.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. And from what I was told, like I say, I'm not a chemist,
10 you know, this is what I'm being told, which I was originally told
11 by Conrail, the train conductor. I think Office Richards was also
12 told. He came across the radio and stated it was liquified
13 petroleum, that this was a flammable material, highly flammable
14 but non-toxic. So, you know, that's what I was -- up to
15 probably -- probably, like I said, I'm on the -- when you hear me
16 talking about cars coming up Commerce Street, that's when I
17 confronted Mr. Cordetti.

18 And at that time I still was under the impression that,
19 you know, this was liquified petroleum. It wasn't until I left
20 the traffic there and walked back up towards Mr. Steven's house
21 where there was -- that small group had gathered and they were --
22 I guess they were finally able to see the placards on the train or
23 the car that was punctured because -- I mean, there was a lot of
24 confusion.

25 I mean, the chloride trailer at one time was told to us

1 that was 20-some deep. Then I heard someone say it was 16 deep.
2 And then before I knew, I think, the final was it was three cars
3 from going in. I didn't even -- I don't know if I would call it
4 smoke, but the vapors in the air were so thick. Like I said,
5 again, when I first arrived I thought the train was on fire. I
6 mean, it looked like smoke, and that it was so heavy that even
7 while I was directing traffic in the beginning I didn't even know
8 that two train -- two cars had fell on its side.

9 You couldn't -- unless you got really -- maybe if you
10 got close enough, but I don't think there was any way to be able
11 to get that close with the thick of the mist to actually identify
12 which car went in unless you could actually count per se. I
13 didn't get that close to count. The closest I got was probably
14 Mr. Stevenson's front door of his house and that was pretty much
15 after the mist had dissipated. Like I said, I was under the
16 impression pretty much the entire time I was there until I left
17 that this was liquified petroleum until I said -- I can't think of
18 the gentleman's name. I think he's the head of -- I'm pretty sure
19 he's the head of Valero's --

20 Q. Are you thinking of Pat Robinson?

21 A. I think that's his -- a heavysset gentleman?

22 Q. Yes. I know who you're talking about.

23 A. Yeah. He had his book out and I guess through -- they
24 were finally be able to read which the placard was, which whatever
25 car was punctured, and they said it was vinyl chloride, that it

1 was, again, a carcinogen, if I'm saying that correctly?

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. I didn't know what that meant. I said, "What does that
4 mean?" And they said it's a cancerous material. I'm like, great,
5 you know. I said, we weren't told this at all. I've been out
6 here this whole time and this is the first time I'm hearing this.
7 I'm telling people that it's one thing and, here, we finally find
8 out it's another.

9 And then again, soon after that, there was the
10 discussion of having the, I guess, the main post, per se, I guess,
11 where there was some conflict between me and the chief as far as
12 where to have it. I mean, it wasn't like a drag out. He just had
13 made a comment he had someone coming with a key to the church and
14 I told him I sent him home. And he's like, why? I said I wasn't
15 going to have anyone come into the area, a civilian at that, into,
16 you know, a toxic area, a hazardous area, whatever we had here.

17 And he just -- I guess he was just mad and walked away,
18 made another phone call. However it happened, he ended up getting
19 a key to the church and, like I said, they end up -- they
20 attempted to have the meeting of all the, I guess, department
21 heads and agencies that were there, but I think it lasted all of
22 five minutes before the air readings came back inside the church
23 and we had to evacuate the church. And that's where they moved it
24 to -- like I said I'm not really sure. It might have been the
25 police station. I think it might went to the fire hall, but

1 that's where they all ended up anyway.

2 Q. Okay. Now, question for you too related to -- I guess,
3 did you speak to Deputy Chief Stevenson prior to your radio
4 transmission, that 7:29 transmission? Had you met him at that
5 point at his house or in that area?

6 A. Yeah. I saw him, yeah, prior to that a few times,
7 speaking to him, I mean, just, you know, getting his wife out of
8 the house, you know. I was a little concerned. The only time I
9 really -- the only time I spoke to him about the incident itself
10 was pretty much after the fact that we were having -- you know, we
11 were going to base our, like our main where we were going to be
12 for all these meetings and stuff in being so close to the site.

13 Q. Um-hum.

14 A. I asked him, you know, what about this? And he just
15 looked at me and just walked away, you know. I assume, you know
16 -- he's deputy chief; Giampola is chief. So he's just following
17 orders through the chief, so --

18 Q. Okay. And the reason I'm asking is, is we noted that --
19 I think it was around 7:10 or so that he had read placards
20 indicating vinyl chloride. And so he did not communicate the
21 vinyl chloride to you at, you know --

22 A. If he -- I mean, unless he -- if he radioed on his band,
23 I don't know. I don't remember hearing it coming across our
24 police band. Now, if he radioed it on the fire band, I don't -- I
25 wasn't scanning the fire band. So if he had said that, that was

1 not relayed to me. I don't think it was relayed to any of the
2 officers. I mean, it may have been one of the tanks that were
3 there, but like I said, I don't think it was -- it wasn't
4 confirmed which tank was punctured to well after, you know, the
5 mist had dissipated.

6 Now, they may have known about it, but when I walked up
7 to them, like I said, I was still under -- I was under the
8 impression that it was vinyl -- it was not vinyl chloride -- it
9 was liquified petroleum. Like I said, if they radioed it out over
10 their fire band to everybody, I wouldn't have never heard that,
11 none of the police officers would have heard that because we don't
12 monitor the fire. It's a whole separate channel.

13 Q. Okay. At what point was a police officer, I guess, at
14 the command post with Chief Giampola; roughly?

15 A. At the command post?

16 Q. Yeah.

17 A. Or at the scene itself?

18 Q. Well, I know Chief Giampola arrived around 7, I think it
19 was 18 or so.

20 A. Right.

21 Q. Or 7:15. Would you say -- were you up there with him at
22 that time or was this after his arrival that you encountered him?

23 A. It was after his arrival. It was way after. At that
24 time, when we -- when I found out -- if you're going back to the
25 point to where I finally found out what the stuff was, that it was

1 vinyl chloride, that was way after the fact. Like I said, he came
2 to the scene. He was with Sgt. Grey a lot. People were showing
3 up finally. Fire department personnel was finally showing up. I,
4 in fact, I think I went on the radio and asked if they were
5 dispatched or not because it had been a while before they had come
6 out there.

7 Q. Um-hum.

8 A. The only time I spoke to him, you know, or anything was,
9 you know, like I said, our -- I wouldn't call it a confrontation,
10 but it was, you know, about having the, you know, this post so
11 close to the scene. At one time they were going to have it at the
12 -- in the driveway of Mr. Stevenson's residence. And then it was
13 like, oh, we're going to have it at the church. And he said he
14 had someone coming with a key. And like I said, this is after --
15 this is just after I found out that this stuff was cancerous. I
16 said, "We're too close. We need to get farther back." And he
17 said, "No, I've got someone with a key." I said, "Well, I told
18 the guy to go home."

19 Q. Um-hum.

20 A. His name was Barry Cordetti. He came in his personal
21 vehicle right up to Commerce and Jefferson. I'm like, "What are
22 you doing here?" And he's like, you know, "Gary" -- I mean, not
23 Gary -- he said, "Alphonse wants me to show up with a key to open
24 the church up." I sent him home. After I sent him home I walked
25 back up and that's when I found out that everything -- you know,

1 what the stuff actually was.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. The whole entire time I was up there till well into it,
4 again, I was under the impression of this was liquified petroleum.
5 You know, I know I'm on the radio stating that it was
6 non-hazardous, but again, that was before I found out what the
7 stuff really was, you know. I was radioing that stuff out and you
8 hear me back on the radio about having cars were coming up Buck
9 Street, coming up Commerce Street and I'm like having -- these
10 cars need to stay -- where are these cars are coming from? That's
11 when I confronted this gentleman, Mr. Cordetti, with the key.

12 But, you know, as far as any of the contact, you know, I
13 was, you know -- I rode all over the place pretty much trying to
14 handle things, but, you know, the impression I had when I gave out
15 transmissions about the stuff, like I said, I was told that it was
16 liquified petroleum. Patrolman Richards was on the radio saying
17 it was liquified petroleum. And then I did not find out that it
18 was, you know, vinyl chloride until I, like I said, I walked up
19 to, I guess, Mr. Robinson and Mr. Robinson, Giampola, Stevenson,
20 it might have been someone else there, I'm not sure, and they had
21 the book out.

22 Q. Um-hum.

23 A. And then I guess they finally confirmed, you know, what
24 car was punctured because, I'll be honest with you, there would
25 have been no way to find out with that mist, the way those cars

1 were tangled up and one was in the water, one's on the side, to
2 see what it was. I think even Conrail had their guys, at the
3 time, were actually on the bridge looking, seeing, trying to
4 figure which one it was. I mean, it was, like I said, it was just
5 a -- you know, confusion just far as even the chlorine trailer,
6 where that was, you know. I was first told that it was, you know,
7 20-some back and that they were going to get rid of those trains
8 once they realized, you know, if they could or not. And then, you
9 know, before you know it, it went from 20 back to in the teens and
10 then it was like, I think the last might have been it was like 3
11 from the water, the first chlorine trailer.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. You know, so -- and like I said, there was -- like I
14 said, the confusion was -- I mean, everything was hindered due to
15 the mist and the way that the trains were positioned, the cars in
16 the water. I mean, how they counted in the beginning, I guess
17 they were just trying to count what they had and then assume that,
18 well, I see two and then I don't see the next five or six. But,
19 you know, I don't know where liquified petroleum came from but
20 that's what we were told when we first showed up to the scene.
21 When I asked the gentleman, I think his name -- I think it was
22 Mathers, I guess his name is?

23 Q. Yeah, I believe he was the train engineer. I know who
24 you're talking about.

25 A. Yeah. He was -- and he was shaken. I mean, he was

1 shaking so bad that the paper -- he was trying to count and as
2 he's counting the paper's shaking.

3 Q. Um-hum.

4 A. And, you know, and he was really concerned about that
5 chlorine trailer, which obviously why. But he told me liquified
6 petroleum and he told Patrolman Richards that. He comes on the
7 radio and said liquified petroleum. And they said their concern
8 was it was flammable, highly flammable. And my concern is I hear
9 the engine like clicking and I didn't know if it was air brakes or
10 something with that diesel motor, and I'm like, well -- I was
11 worried about a flashover, this stuff igniting and just going off.

12 So, I said -- you know, we were like, let's get the
13 train out of here, and they said no problem. And they
14 disconnected it and that was the last I think I saw of Mathers. I
15 know there was -- I heard there was another guy involved, another
16 gentleman. I never saw him. It was pretty much Mathers and there
17 was a gentleman, I guess, he was an engineer or something to do
18 with it. He was an African American gentleman. He had a hard hat
19 on and a safety vest on. I'm not sure. He was there. They were
20 the only two I saw as far as the train was concerned at that time,
21 the original call.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. If there was a third or fourth person, I never saw them
24 or spoke to them.

25 Q. Okay. Now, did Chief Giampola -- I mean, I know at one

1 point he told us that, basically, the evacuation responsibility
2 was sort of left to the police and I know he mentioned you. Did
3 he provide any guidance at all to you related to, as you said, the
4 material evacuation radius or was that sort of something you were
5 working on within the police department alone?

6 A. I was -- I don't remember -- if he was, he might have
7 been with Sgt. Grey.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. But when -- as the mist was spreading, other officers
10 were -- you know, I guess, it was getting -- were saying that it
11 was at Broad. We heard that one officer said that someone coming
12 from the bridge into Paulsboro, it was underneath the bridge. So
13 the further it went out, the further we decided we had to, you
14 know, spread out our evacuation zone.

15 This is sort of like we're on the fly. I mean, we're
16 getting it -- you know, I'm at the base and I can't tell you how
17 far it's going. We're getting bits and pieces to where we figure
18 the best to shelter in place. If it's non-toxic -- of course,
19 that's our impression -- then just shelter in place, stay put. We
20 wouldn't be able to evacuate everyone anyway. I mean, if there
21 was -- even if there was only 100 people, which it probably was
22 way more than that, there was no way I'm going to have people
23 running through the streets of Paulsboro trying to direct them
24 somewhere. I didn't have the manpower for that.

25 And, again, since the impression that we were told it

1 was non-toxic, we figured shelter in place, schools shelter in
2 place. You know, I heard there was some issues with the schools
3 turning kids away. I couldn't -- I mean, I just remember what I
4 heard.

5 But as far as direction, we were the first ones out
6 there. Fire personnel didn't show up for a while, maybe 15
7 minutes, so we weren't going to sit around and wait. We pretty
8 much, you know, assessed the situation, what we had and what we
9 thought was in the air, were told was in the air, and just tried
10 to do the best we could as far as, you know, making the decision
11 on it. Evacuating was first, and then once the stuff started
12 spreading, it was like we just didn't -- you know, towns around us
13 weren't able to even help us as much as they -- you know, they
14 probably -- they didn't have the manpower. So we just went to
15 shelter in place. Again, we're assuming this is a non-toxic, you
16 know, liquified petroleum.

17 Q. Okay. Well, that definitely helps a lot understanding,
18 you know, what information you had and what you were using for
19 those evacuation orders or even the shelter in place orders.

20 A. Yeah. I know we went back a few times back and forth
21 but it was -- again, I never dealt with this stuff before.

22 Q. Um-hum.

23 A. The training we have is twice a year, an hour of hazmat,
24 you know, how to read placards and stuff like that. But, you
25 know, that mist, I would call it, or fog, like I said, it was so

1 thick when I first arrived I turned to Sgt. Grey because we rode
2 together and I said, it looks like -- "I think the train's on
3 fire." But we knew once we pulled right up to the scene and once
4 we got out of our car that it just wasn't a burning smell like of
5 -- even like a metal or a plastic or something like that. And,
6 like I said, I got a car and I took it -- I think it was Officer
7 Zubec's car -- I took it block off Commerce, and that's when I
8 spoke with -- I think his name was Mathers. And that's when he
9 had told me about the liquified petroleum.

10 I sent him over to Sgt. Grey because when he mentioned
11 the vinyl -- not the vinyl chloride -- the chlorine trailer and
12 about the damage that could have done, that was like, "Well, you
13 need to go see Sgt. Grey right now." And I sent him over there
14 and I just stayed put to where he was, blocking traffic.

15 Q. Okay. Now, a question regarding the positioning of
16 folks. So you said you were at the crossing Mantua Avenue?

17 A. Yeah. At Mantua Avenue there's two sets of tracks.

18 Q. Um-hum.

19 A. The track the train was on is the main rail line coming
20 from, I guess you would say, north/south?

21 Q. Yeah.

22 A. It was coming from West Deptford. There's a second set
23 of tracks, which they use just pretty much to shuffle cars around.

24 Q. Um-hum.

25 A. And that's probably, I would say, 40 feet away. It's

1 not that far away. You know, I definitely can -- I could see if
2 it was clear, you know, the train and everything.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. That's where Mathers was. He was -- because we asked
5 where he -- he had the, I guess, the list of cars. And when I
6 went over there, he was stopping traffic and he's telling me it's
7 liquified petroleum and it's flammable, but he was really
8 concerned about the chlorine. And that's when I sent him directly
9 over to Sgt. Grey.

10 Q. And Sgt. Grey was with Patrolman Richards, correct?

11 A. Yeah, they were pretty much -- Sgt. Grey, Sgt. Richards
12 and Patrolman Zubec were pretty much in the same area. I couldn't
13 tell you they were directly next to each other --

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. -- because they were all over -- that is one shift.
16 Again, I was -- I, actually, was done work, just getting ready to
17 walk out the door when the call came out. You know, when it came
18 out this is a derailment, I figured, ah, it's just maybe coal.
19 Because I think the last derailment we had was just coal, car
20 spill on the side. As we're getting there, Sgt. Richards is
21 coming out, "Hazards material, there's a leak. All right, guys,
22 this is going to be bad."

23 Q. Um-hum.

24 A. And that's when I went out with Sgt. Grey to assist him
25 as best I could.

1 Q. Okay. Can you describe to me sort of your interactions
2 with the incident command and, you know, maybe elaborate a little
3 more on some of the advice you were giving and any input they were
4 providing you to help us understand the decision-making process
5 you had to undergo?

6 A. The incident command post was only -- that didn't
7 happen, an actual command post, didn't happen till, like I said,
8 once -- like I said, trying to place in time what I can hear on
9 the radio, is you hear me directing there's cars coming up
10 Commerce.

11 Q. Um-hum.

12 A. Once I'm done that, I go -- I walk back up to
13 Stevenson's house where that's where I met with, I guess,
14 Mr. Robinson, I guess his name was, and Giampola, and that's where
15 they -- I guess they're looking through the book saying, oh, this
16 is -- no, that's vinyl chloride. And they're reading, I guess,
17 what hazards are with that and they're saying it's carcinogen.
18 Right then and there, I guess, they had already made a mind that
19 the command post -- or Chief Giampola made the decision the
20 command was going to be at St. James Church. They had a guy
21 coming with a key.

22 Prior to that, as far as my, you know, connection, it
23 was pretty much we were just like walking around just trying to
24 make sure the area was secure. As far as the trains and
25 everything else, I wasn't involved with that. I was just pretty

1 much looking at perimeter of the area. That's why, like I said, I
2 seen cars coming towards us that shouldn't. I knew they were
3 civilian vehicles. They weren't police markings or anything like
4 that.

5 Like I said, the only command post that I had was when I
6 found out what the stuff was and when they decide to -- where they
7 were going to have the command post, once there was a key, they
8 opened up the church. They went inside. I was just standing
9 inside the church with everybody else and they were just, at the
10 time, were just introducing themselves, who was where and what
11 they had. And I didn't get too much into the conversation of
12 anything when they had these readers, air monitors, that said it
13 was too high and that they had to get out of the church. And
14 that's when we all left the church.

15 Q. Do you recall who provided the readings or who told --
16 who made that notification?

17 A. I don't know if it was -- I don't. I don't know. I
18 could not tell you. There were so many people there. Again, I
19 wasn't involved in the command post to that point to where I knew
20 who was in charge of, you know, communication, who's in charge of
21 manpower. I don't know if that was even established yet. It may
22 have been, but I wasn't part of that. Again, I was -- you know, I
23 wasn't near the fire personnel. They were down near the trains.

24 Q. Um-hum.

25 A. I was more, like I said, towards the roadway. Everyone

1 was just pretty much -- you know, once, like I said, the mist
2 dissipated, they were just looking at the incident itself. The
3 Coast Guard showed up. But who had the monitor, who actually -- I
4 couldn't tell you. I don't know if it was the state. Maybe the
5 state police had their monitor or the state marine, I'm not really
6 sure.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. But I remember us in that church and they were still
9 introducing themselves and we had to evacuate the church. We left
10 the church.

11 Q. What --

12 A. I'm sorry?

13 Q. I was going to say, what was Chief Giampola's response
14 to those readings?

15 A. I don't know. He left with us.

16 Q. He did? Okay.

17 A. Yeah. I mean, it was -- I mean, I don't know how those
18 readings -- what's high and what's low.

19 Q. Um-hum.

20 A. You know, when someone tells me there are parts, you
21 know, there are 500 parts per million, it doesn't sound -- that
22 sounds pretty high. I take whoever is reading it, you know, what
23 they say for what it is. My main concern was just the fact that
24 we were just so close. The mist had gone, but we didn't know if
25 there was still stuff still in the tank, if it had become

1 activated, if it was being activated by the water, which was
2 causing this mist, you know. Now we know it's cancerous, you
3 know, we don't need to be 50 yards from the train.

4 Q. Um-hum.

5 A. You know, because if something happens to us as, you
6 know, command leaders or people on scene, you know, they're going
7 to send more people in to come save us and they're just going to
8 -- you know, they're also going to get sick or ill. So we need to
9 get out, as far as the leadership of it all, the coordinators, far
10 away. That was just -- that's what I just thought, but obviously
11 it didn't -- you know, the point was, no, we're having it right
12 here. Okay. That is not my call.

13 Q. Um-hum.

14 A. I just recommended I just didn't think it was safe to be
15 so close now that we know what the stuff is. And, again, these
16 guys are making decisions and if something blows up, who are you
17 going to call? Are you going to call the guy that's there? Well,
18 he's dead now, so --

19 Q. True. True.

20 A. We needed to be out as far -- and people who had, you
21 know, the respirators and the train personnel, let them handle the
22 situation. But they wanted to have the meeting there. Or Chief
23 Giampola made the decision to have the meeting at the church. I
24 don't know if there was any conversation with any other agencies
25 between him about having it there or not having it there. Like I

1 said, he wasn't happy when I said I sent the guy home with the
2 key.

3 Q. Um-hum.

4 A. Now, if he -- I don't know if he called Mr. Cordetti
5 back but he ended up getting inside the church a few minutes later
6 and that's where they all met for -- they might have been in there
7 maybe, maybe 5 minutes not even that. I mean, maybe 5, 10
8 minutes, I couldn't tell you. It was brief.

9 Q. Um-hum.

10 A. You know, so, I mean, we couldn't -- introductions
11 weren't even done yet where it was like they're getting high
12 readings and we need to get out of there, so --

13 Q. Do you recall what the readings were or what was being
14 reported at that time?

15 A. No. No. I couldn't tell you. I know they were
16 receiving -- I know when -- at the same time when I found out, we
17 were still standing outside. Before I had the discussion about
18 the -- where we were having the command post at, we found it was
19 cancerous, I know Mr. Robinson stated that the refinery was
20 getting readings all the way at their plant, which was, I don't
21 know, maybe it's a half a mile away or so. It's the other end of
22 town.

23 Q. Um-hum.

24 A. And, now, that was prior to, you know, going into the
25 church. Again, I couldn't tell you what the readings were.

1 Offhand, I don't know. I mean, like I said, these guys were
2 reading out numbers and if someone says, man, that's high, I'm
3 taking their word that it's high. I couldn't tell you what's high
4 or low. You could give me a number and I couldn't tell you, you
5 know. It could be high, but I'm not that educated to tell you in
6 that field of what's high and what's not, especially if, you
7 know -- I'm sure every chemical that they transport could be
8 different.

9 Q. Um-hum.

10 A. If vinyl chloride is 900 and that's dangerous, where 900
11 for maybe liquified petroleum is nothing. I don't know. I mean,
12 I don't know if there's a difference there or, you know. I just
13 know that when I found out it was cancerous, I was like you've got
14 to be -- I was pissed off because, like I said, we're way into the
15 incident here.

16 Q. Yeah.

17 A. You know, this is right before they made the decision to
18 have the command post at St. James, which is, you know, after I'm
19 on the radio saying it's not toxic, you know, because I'm just
20 thinking flammable.

21 Q. Um-hum.

22 A. I'm thinking flashover, I'm thinking, you know, the
23 stuff's going to go kaboom, so --

24 Q. Understandable.

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. Let's see here. I had one other -- were there any
2 changes to the procedures or things that you guys considered once
3 you discovered that it was vinyl chloride in terms of the
4 evacuation and guidance to the public?

5 A. Well, like I said, I went home -- I think I had gone
6 home around 10:30 that morning.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. I went home, stripped my clothes off, got a shower and
9 went to bed.

10 Q. Um-hum.

11 A. I don't know what happened after that as far as -- you
12 know, I woke up around 4:00, maybe 3:00, wasn't feeling well.
13 Just thought it was just lack of sleep because I only got 4 or 5
14 hours of sleep being up for 20-something hours.

15 Q. Um-hum.

16 A. So I couldn't tell you after I went home as far as what
17 happened afterwards as far as, you know, the command post and any
18 further evacuations. The evacuations that were finally made as
19 far as the count itself when they evacuated, head count, and then
20 there was another part of town, I think that was all done through
21 the Coast Guard. I mean, I don't know, there was a lot of -- like
22 I said, this is all second, third-hand -- I heard there was a lot
23 of bickering going on between the town council and agencies, who's
24 handling what.

25 I wasn't there. Representatives from our department

1 was -- our captain was there all day long. I mean, he would have
2 more information as far as exactly what happened concerning
3 evacuations and furthering the area and securing more than -- it
4 was around 10:30, I think, when I finally clocked out.

5 Q. 10:30.

6 A. So I left there probably -- it took me like 10 minutes
7 to get back.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. So, probably around a quarter after 10, I was off the
10 scene.

11 Q. Excellent.

12 A. Quarter after -- yeah, quarter after.

13 Q. Okay. Well, this is definitely very helpful for us to
14 understand, you know, what information was available. And so do
15 you have anything else to add that you want on record?

16 A. I mean, I don't -- I did not hear any of the other --
17 like I said, I don't know what anyone else said.

18 Q. Um-hum.

19 A. I've heard from other officers that are more involved in
20 this, this incident, as far as, you know, them reading transcripts
21 and I know I heard -- the only reason why I reached out to you, I
22 mean, I wasn't spoken to or talked to after the incident directly.
23 I think Sgt. Grey and Sean Richards were interviewed by your
24 organization.

25 Q. Um-hum.

1 A. I didn't think nothing of it. I figured your guys had
2 your information, you had your hearings. And then after the
3 hearings I'm starting to hear that, well, they're blaming you.
4 They're saying you're the one that told them it was non-toxic.
5 You're the one that said this on the radio. And I'm like, whoa,
6 wait a minute. I said, if I did say that, that was because I
7 didn't -- I was under the impression that it was still liquified
8 petroleum that we all were told at the scene. And that Patrolman
9 Richards gets on the radio and says liquified petroleum, I was
10 being told. We were being told verbally that's a flammable gas.
11 That's why we got the train out of there.

12 Q. Um-hum.

13 A. You know, like I said, I did not find out -- it was way
14 into it that, I mean, that it was, you know, vinyl chloride and
15 what the, you know, what harmful effects would have on people.
16 And that's why we went to shelter in place. I mean, to be honest
17 with you, if it was cancerous, we all would have got out there. I
18 don't know if -- I mean, I, personally, evacuating people, that
19 would have been a horrendous effort to do. I mean, we don't even
20 have -- we have two school buses in our school district.

21 Q. Yeah.

22 A. We wouldn't have been able to bus people out. And
23 telling people to leave their house and start walking, you know,
24 towards the fire hall, I might have even put them more at risk
25 inhaling the stuff than just locking down their house and closing

1 all the windows and all their vents. Now, I know a lot of people
2 didn't know what shelter in place meant. Again, I know that was
3 an issue.

4 But like I said, I just sort of like just want people to
5 understand that, you know, what I knew at the time was that this
6 stuff was non-toxic. It was not cancerous. That, you know, I
7 didn't find that out until way after the fact of, you know, that
8 this had gone on. And by that time the mist had already been
9 dissipated. I mean, it was blue skies, bright sun and -- you
10 know, I just want -- you know, I don't want to point the finger at
11 anyone else. I mean, that's what happened. You know, we were
12 told one thing. As the police unit we did what we thought was
13 correct based upon the hazards that we were presented in front of
14 us.

15 And, I mean, at the time it seemed like the right thing
16 to do: shelter in place, non-toxic, but it is flammable, get the
17 train out of there and try to eliminate any type of igniting
18 agents, whatever it could be. I mean, if it was -- I look at this
19 way. If everybody else was under the impression that it was vinyl
20 chloride and cancerous, why was my fire chief telling we're going
21 to have the command post 50 feet -- or 50 yards from the train
22 derailment? I mean, why would you do that?

23 Q. Um-hum.

24 A. You know what I mean? So, obviously, maybe he thought
25 too -- that he didn't know it was vinyl chloride or maybe he knew

1 it was vinyl chloride but didn't know it was that toxic. I don't
2 know. But, you know, there was people walking around that train.
3 Mr. Stevenson was walking around that train the entire time or his
4 house. His wife was there in the house. I think his father, who
5 lives across the street, came out. We had council members out
6 there, Coast Guard personnel. There was tons of people that were
7 walking around this thing earlier where there was, you know, the
8 mist was there, but it could have been a little bit of fog but you
9 could see a sheen in the water.

10 Q. Um-hum.

11 A. That if it was this toxic, nobody, none of them said
12 anything, you know. So I don't know if everybody else was under
13 the same impression that I was, but like I said, I didn't find out
14 anything, you know, that this stuff -- what it was and how the
15 health risk was until way after the fact. And the only way I can
16 pretty much timetable it in the transcript -- not transcript I
17 have, but the audio that I have, is that there is a point to where
18 I'm directing -- I'm asking for more personnel to stop cars from
19 coming down Commerce.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. And these cars are coming down. That's when I met
22 Cordetti and, you know -- I was there till 10, probably till like
23 quarter after 10. Whatever happened after that, I couldn't tell
24 you.

25 Q. Well, this is great. And what I'll do right now is, if

1 you don't have anything else to add to the recording, we can sort
2 of terminate the recording at this point.

3 A. Okay.

4 Q. Is that fine? All right?

5 A. That's fine. Yes.

6 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: CONRAIL DERAILMENT/HAZARDOUS
 MATERIAL RELEASE
 PAULSBORO, NEW JERSEY
 NOVEMBER 30, 2012
 Telephonic Interview of Christopher
 Gilcrest

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-13-MR-002

PLACE: Paulsboro, New Jersey

DATE: September 6, 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.

Vanita Tildon
Transcriber