National Transportation Safety Board
Interview Transcript

Case #: DCA-14MP001 Birmingham, AL

Mr. Cameron Hyche:

Reference: Interview Regarding the December 17, 2013 Alagasco, Gate City Natural Gas Release with Ignition - NTSB accident number: DCA-14MP-001.

Attached is a transcript of your interview that was conducted by telephone, on September 4, 2014 as a part of the on-going investigation of the above referenced accident. Please review the transcript for accuracy and make any necessary editorial changes.

Changes may either reference the relevant page and line number or with a redlined copy of the document. Please initial any changes when marking up or redlining the original document.

When replying be sure and checkmark one of the three statements below, even if you have no changes.

Please submit replies to [redacted] by email no later than ***September 26, 2014***.

I have reviewed my transcript(s) from the above referenced accident and…

- ☐ I have no comments to make.
- ☐ My comments are submitted herewith.
- ☐ My comments are marked on the attached copy.

Please note that these transcripts must be treated as confidential at this time. These transcripts are for your use only, and not for release outside of the investigation. If you have any questions, please contact Ravi Chhatre at [redacted] or by email,[redacted]

Thank you for your assistance and cooperation,

Matthew Nicholson, PE
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:	*	
	*	
ALABAMA GAS CORPORATION (ALAGASCO)	*	
NATURAL GAS RELEASE WITH IGNITION	*	Docket No.: DCA-14-MP-001
BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA	*	
DECEMBER 17, 2013	*	
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Telephonic Interview of: CAMERON HYCHE

NTSB Headquarters
Washington, D.C.

Thursday,
September 4, 2014

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: MATTHEW NICHOLSON
Investigator-in-Charge

APPEARANCES:

MATTHEW NICHOLSON, Investigator-in-Charge
National Transportation Safety Board
Washington, D.C. 20594

RAVI CHHATRE, Accident Investigator
Pipeline Division
National Transportation Safety Board

KALU KELLY EMEABA, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

DAVID GALLAGHER, Customer Service Manager
Birmingham Metro, Alagasco
(Telephonically)

BOB GARDNER, Director, Quality Assurance and Compliance
Alabama Gas Corporation (Alagasco)
(Telephonically)

MIKE BELL, Esq.
(Representative on behalf of Mr. Hyche)
(Telephonically)

WALLACE JONES, Administrator, Gas Pipeline Safety
Alabama Public Service Commission
(Telephonically)

KEITH BLACKWOOD, Pipeline Safety Investigator
Alabama Public Service Commission
(Telephonically)

I N D E X

I N T E R V I E W

MR. NICHOLSON: We are on the record. Good morning. Today is Thursday, September 4, 2014. My name is Matthew Nicholson and I'm an investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board. We are conducting this teleconference interview from the NTSB headquarters in Washington, D.C. This interview is being conducted in regard to case number DCA-14-MP-001 in the investigation into the natural gas distribution release and ignition that occurred in Gate City, Birmingham, Alabama on December 17, 2013.

This interview is being recorded and may be transcribed at a later date. A copy of the transcript will be provided to the interviewee for review prior to being entered into the public docket.

Mr. Hyche, you are permitted to have one other person present during this interview. This is a person of your choice: supervisor, counsel, friend, family member, or nobody at all. Please state for the record who you have selected to be with you.

MR. HYCHE: Mike Bell.

MR. NICHOLSON: Terrific. Now I'd like to have each person on the phone today state your name with spelling, your title and the agency or organization you are representing. The NTSB members will start followed by Alagasco and then the PSC.

We're going to stop here for a second. Off the record. We've got something to discuss here.

(Off the record.)

(On the record.)

MR. NICHOLSON: On the record. Back on the record. Matthew Nicholson, spelled M-a-t-t-h-e-w, N-i-c-h-o-l-s-o-n. My e-mail is [redacted]

MR. CHHATRE: Ravi Chhatre. That's R-a-v-i, C-h-h-a-t-r-e. I'm with National Transportation Safety Board, Pipeline Division.

MR. EMEABA: Kalu Kelly Emeaba, spelled K-a-l-u, K-e-l-l-y, E-m-e-a-b-a. I'm an investigator with NTSB.

MR. NICHOLSON: Go ahead Alagasco.

MR. HYCHE: Cameron Hyche, spelled C-a-m-e-r-o-n, H-y-c-h-e, Assistant Specialist.

MR. GARDNER: Bob Gardner, G-a-r-d-n-e-r, Director of Quality Assurance and Compliance for Alagasco.

MR. GALLAGHER: David Gallagher, D-a-v-i-d, G-a-l-l-a-g-h-e-r, Customer Service Manager of Metro.

MR. BELL: Mike Bell, attorney representative for Cameron Hyche. Bell is B-e-l-l.

MR. JONES: Okay. Wallace P. Jones, Alabama Public Service Commission, Administrator, Gas Pipeline Safety. That's spelled W-a-l-l-a-c-e, J-o-n-e-s.

MR. BLACKWOOD: Keith Blackwood, K-e-i-t-h, B-l-a-c-k-w-o-o-d, Gas Pipeline Safety Investigator, Alabama Public Service Commission.

MR. NICHOLSON: Okay, that's everyone. All right.

INTERVIEW OF CAMERON HYCHE

BY MR. NICHOLSON:

Q. Cameron, to begin with, maybe just go ahead and give us a little bit of background for the record, when did you start at Alagasco, what jobs you've held and bring us up-to-date.

A. I started in September 17, 2012, entry-level position as a crewman. About a year and a half later I started -- or accepted a position as assistant specialist and have held that title since. I've been there 2 years now.

Q. And can you talk to us a little bit about what an assistant specialist does, what kind of responsibilities you have?

A. An assistant specialist aids in helping journeymen on the truck and on the jobsite, making sure the job gets done in a safe manner. And if the journeyman is off, he will take the responsibilities of running the truck for that day.

Q. Okay. And what group are you -- what do you -- who do you report to, what group are you in? Are you in construction or operations?

A. Construction.

Q. So who do you report to? Who's your supervisor?

A. Todd Harmon.

Q. Can you spell that, please?

A. T-o-d, H-a-r-m-o-n. All right, Todd has two D's in his name, so it would be T-o-d-d.

Q. Okay, terrific. Who else was on the truck on the day of the accident with you?

A. My journeyman that morning was Dan Ingram, and we had Adolphus Griggs and Jason Lawrence on the truck that morning.

Q. Can you spell Adolphus -- was it Griggs?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Can we get the spellings, please?

MR. GARDNER: Can you give us just a moment, Matt, I'll look it up. I'm not sure.

MR. NICHOLSON: Oh, okay. I'm sorry, I thought you had it.

MR. HYCHE: Are you ready for the spelling of Adolphus Griggs?

BY MR. NICHOLSON:

Q. Yes, please.

A. First name Adolphus, A-d-o-l-p-h-u-s, last name Griggs, G-r-i-g-g-s.

Q. Okay. And then the last person that was with you, I didn't get his name and spelling.

A. Jason Lawrence, and we're looking the spelling up.

Q. Okay. What is Adolphus Griggs' position? Is he also assistant specialist?

A. No, sir. He is a crewman.

Q. Okay. And what about Jason?

A. He has since moved departments to meter reading.

Q. What was he on the date of the accident when he was with you?

A. A crewman.

Q. Crewman, okay. Okay, Cameron, I think we'll just go ahead --

A. You ready?

Q. -- and move on. Is it -- I think we've got the spelling, Jason Lawrence, L-a-w-r-e-n-c-e?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Okay. Let's go ahead to the day of the accident and if you would just kind of walk us through the events as you remember them, starting with how you were notified and what time you got on scene and then take it from there, if you would.

A. I was in bed asleep that morning. I don't remember the exact time. I believe it was between 2:45 and 3:00 in the morning I got a phone call from our radio room or our dispatcher and they notified me that I needed to come in, that we've had an explosion.

So I get up, get dressed, told my parents I was leaving. Got on my way to work, I contacted the radio room to find out who my journeyman was to know which office I needed to report to, whether it be the Bessemer office, the Pelham office or the Birmingham office, and they told me my journeyman was Dan Ingram. So I got to the office -- I'm not sure what time I got there that morning -- got the truck ready that Dan is responsible for. He pulled in about 10 minutes after I did. Jason and Adolphus got on

the truck and we headed towards Marks Village.

We got out to Marks Village -- we were the second truck on scene that morning -- and then we started to try to get the riser that was blowing. We tried to get it capped off or the flow of gas shut off. The service man ended up walking up and valving it off once the fire department had put the flame out, and then we started bar testing over the main next to the building, finding out where our gas readings were.

We centered it over the gas main and we started to dig there. While they were digging, they had already dug up the service to the building and we cut it and capped it about 5 foot from the street to take gas off the service to get it away from the building site. And when I got out of the hole abandoning the service, they asked me to go ahead since I had my PPE on to catch gas, to go ahead and put the repair clamp on the main where it was broke or where the leak was.

Q. Okay. Can you talk about that, how the line was excavated and then what you did when you got down in the trench?

A. Dan Ingram was the operator digging that down the backhoe, and he started to dig a trench and every couple of foot we would use a sharpshooter shovel to probe for the main so we were careful not to hit it. Once we located it with a sharpshooter we knew where to dig. So we got beside it, dug down, and I uncovered it with the shovel and saw where the gas was blowing from.

Once we located where it was blowing, we cleaned off around it and noticed that there was a root wrapped around it with a rock penned in between there. I tried with a shovel to get the root off and I couldn't. So I had Dan bring the backhoe bucket into the excavation and barely catch part of the root enough to break the root out of my way. Then I grabbed the rock, moved it off the main and, again, to clean out from around the main where the dirt was, I took a scraper, scraped off the main, used some soap to clean all the dirt off, and put the repair clamp on and tightened it down.

Q. Okay. So just -- let's back up a little bit. The sharpshooter, what was that?

A. A shovel.

Q. Okay.

A. I used it to probe -- stick in the ground to see where the main was, how deep it was, to keep from hitting it with the backhoe.

Q. Okay. And was there water in the trench at this time?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Okay. Where was the water coming from?

A. There was groundwater seeping in and it was runoff from the fire trucks that morning.

Q. Okay.

A. So the hole was filling up.

Q. So did you have to use a sump pump? How did you manage

the water?

A. We didn't have a pump that morning. We took a couple of scoops with the backhoe bucket and dug a hole for it to run off in --

Q. Okay.

A. -- to keep from backing up on where I was working.

Q. Can you describe a little bit, you said you tried to cut the root first with your shovel but you couldn't and then you had Dan come in with the backhoe. Whereabouts on the main were you? I'm looking at your sketch, ALGC002684. Where were you cutting the root? Where were you trying to extract it, over the rock or towards the tree?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: -- the photograph helps better.

MR. HYCHE: Do you have the photograph?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: 2680.

MR. HYCHE: 2680?

BY MR. NICHOLSON:

Q. Yes. Yeah, we got it.

A. Where the red arrow with the root around rock and main, that was facing the tree. Dan was digging with the tree to his back and I had him come about, I want to say, about a foot away from where the gas was escaping, and he managed to get a tooth in the root enough to break it out of my way.

Q. Okay. So just to get my bearings -- I'm not quite clear -- the tree is towards the top of the photo?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Okay. And, I'm sorry, you said he hit it where? Just south of the -- or just below the red arrow that says "root around rock and main"?

A. Yes, sir. About a foot from that arrow is where he managed to get it with the backhoe and was able to break the root out of my way.

Q. Okay. And so the -- once he had cut that part of the root, was the rock free?

A. It was still kind of saddled on the main. It was still sitting there and I grabbed it off of the main --

Q. Yeah, it's hard to see --

A. -- and sat it on the bank.

Q. The pictures look as if the rock has a bit of a contour to it, is that what you were saying, it's sitting on the main? Did it have a contour? If I look at 2682, is that the rock?

A. Yes, sir, that is the rock and that was the contour that was sitting on the main.

Q. Okay. And it's not -- that's not a clump of soil; that's actually a rock, correct?

A. That is a rock.

Q. Okay. Where did the rock end up?

MR. NICHOLSON: Do we have that still or did we take it; do you remember, Bob?

MR. GALLAGHER: This is David. Matt, the rock is in the

NTSB pod that we have in a blue bag marked Alagasco, and the root as well is in that bag.

MR. NICHOLSON: Terrific.

MR. GARDNER: Well, we're not -- for clarification, the root -- obviously we haven't looked at this -- we haven't been back in the pod since you guys were here and were with us in it, so we know we have the rock and --

MR. GALLAGHER: A piece of the root.

MR. GARDNER: -- a piece of the root. We're not sure exactly from which -- what -- if it's exactly over the pipe, exactly over the area of the leak, excuse me.

MR. NICHOLSON: Right. Okay. But it's a portion of the root that was extracted by Cameron on the day of the accident?

MR. GARDNER: Hang on just a second. Hey, Matt?

MR. NICHOLSON: Yeah.

MR. GARDNER: David's going to explain that. He had more familiarity than the rest of us.

MR. NICHOLSON: Okay.

MR. GALLAGHER: Matt, they did break a piece of the root off to make that repair and it got thrown up on the bank. And then there was a piece of the root -- the root went back towards the tree on top of the main, and as we stripped it to put the plastic in, they cut a piece of the root out that was on top of the main. They didn't break it out. I don't know which pieces, I don't remember what piece we have in that bag, but it was put on

one of the pictures. There's a sewer lid that we took some pictures of the root, and that's what we have in the bag with the rock.

MR. NICHOLSON: Okay.

MR. GALLAGHER: I believe it's a blue bag.

MR. GARDNER: And keep in mind, Matt, this is the second day when the plastic is being put in, in place of the cast iron.

MR. NICHOLSON: Right.

MR. GARDNER: The picture labeled for 2682 is from 12/17 and then 2683, where you see pictures of the root, that is from 12/18. And so it would be after the pipe had been repaired. These pictures reflect the condition as it was in the ground, but the repair had been made to the section of pipe that Cameron worked on.

MR. NICHOLSON: Okay.

MR. GARDNER: But these pictures are representative of the root.

MR. NICHOLSON: I see. Okay. So this is --

MR. GARDNER: Does that help?

MR. NICHOLSON: Yeah, I think so. So these are portions of the root that were identified as you excavated a little farther back?

MR. GALLAGHER: Yes. The piece that is on 2683, you see a piece that looks like it was sawed?

MR. NICHOLSON: Yes.

MR. GALLAGHER: And that is, we sawed that to get it off the main, but I don't know which piece of the root we have in the bag.

MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. Yeah, I noticed that one of them looks cut and the other one looks like, I don't know, it was maybe hit with a shovel. It looks a little rougher, the one above that picture on the middle left, photograph on 2683.

MR. GALLAGHER: Yes.

MR. GARDNER: Are you talking about the one that's got the 410 label in the lower left corner in small print?

MR. NICHOLSON: Actually, it's a 408. I'm looking at --

MR. GARDNER: 408, Okay.

MR. NICHOLSON: Yeah, just to the left of that.

MR. GARDNER: Okay. Yes, I see that.

MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. Ravi, you want to --

MR. CHHATRE: Yeah.

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. I'm sorry, I want to go back to you 2680, and I'm not sure I understand the picture very well because I guess a copy it's not that good. But if you look at the big frame there which says root around the rock and the main in the area of leak, can you show me in there where the pipe is, which is root and where is the water? I think there's some water there too?

A. The main is around or up under exposed -- where the arrow, the red arrow is pointing, that is the root on top of the

main. You cannot see the main in this picture. The main is up under the root right there at the edge of the water.

Q. Okay. So that small light colored section is the root?

MR. GARDNER: Could you repeat the question, Ravi?

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. Yeah. The picture is not very clear and I'm just trying to find out -- I see a dark, white patch going from bottom to top. On the right is some light-colored area, which I am presuming, is water. And then there are two arrows. And one says, root around the rock and main, and I'm just trying to find out which is root and which is the dark soil or trench?

MR. NICHOLSON: It's a hard photograph to decipher, but what Ravi is asking is that -- sort of that light patch just to the right of your red arrow, is that the root in that photograph?

MR. HYCHE: Yes, sir, at the top of the picture.

MR. NICHOLSON: Okay.

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. And the size of the rock, can you tell us was it like -- looks like 3 inches wide, 4 inches or something like that. Is that the correct size? If you look at your picture 2682.

A. I have pictures on 2682 with the rock next to a tape measure.

Q. Correct. In all honesty, I've never seen a rock with a contour of a pipe. And I'm -- pardon me for double checking this, but are you guys sure it's not a hardened soil and a rock? That

looks like something was kind of dried on the pipe. The contour is so smooth and it seems to match the pipe. I want to make sure that we are looking at the rock itself and not the very hardened soil.

A. The best I can recall, I believe it's a rock.

Q. Okay. We still have rock, we can always double check.

MR. NICHOLSON: You want him to ship it to us?

MR. CHHATRE: Yeah, maybe we should, yeah.

MR. NICHOLSON: Yeah. Do you want to just grab that package, that rock, very carefully and send it to us, Bob?

MR. CHHATRE: Rock and root.

MR. NICHOLSON: Yeah --

MR. GARDNER: Yes.

MR. NICHOLSON: -- the rock and the root.

MR. GARDNER: Yes, I can do that.

MR. NICHOLSON: Okay.

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. Great. Now going back, on the day of the accident you said you had woken up around 2:45, 3-ish, you got dressed up and you left and you went to office. How far is the office from your home?

MR. BELL: Hey, Ravi?

MR. CHHATRE: Yes.

MR. BELL: Matt, this is Mike. Just so we're clear, the bag that's in the NTSB pod has the rock and some portions of root.

Do you want just to have Bob send you whatever is in that blue bag; is that the direction you're giving us?

MR. CHHATRE: Yes.

MR. NICHOLSON: Yes, that --

MR. GARDNER: In other words, if I'm not -- I don't necessarily need or should open it. I can just send you what's in that bag that's labeled rock and root?

MR. NICHOLSON: Yes.

MR. GARDNER: It's got Alagasco on it. We've not been in the pod nor opened any of the contents without you guys being present, so --

MR. CHHATRE: We understand.

MR. NICHOLSON: I understand, but we don't want to have to make a trip down there.

MR. CHHATRE: I guess, pretty much --

MR. GARDNER: I'm sorry, I couldn't --

MR. NICHOLSON: Yeah, we're asking you, Bob, to enter the pod on our behalf, take the blue bag with the root and the rock, package it carefully, and send it to the same address you would have sent the accident pipe.

MR. GARDNER: Okay. I'll be glad to do that.

MR. NICHOLSON: And I'll back that up in writing if you'd like me to send you an e-mail to that effect.

MR. GARDNER: No, this is fine.

MR. NICHOLSON: Okay.

MR. CHHATRE: The transcript will show it anyway.

MR. GARDNER: I should be able to get that to you this week.

MR. EMEABA: With respect to that -- this is Kelly Emeaba. Mr. Wallace Jones from the PSC people who actually work along with you people while you do this.

MR. NICHOLSON: So I think Kelly is requesting that maybe Wallace be present when you package it and send it. Is that something you could -- but Wallace is out of Montgomery.

MR. CHHATRE: Yeah.

MR. NICHOLSON: You're asking Wallace to make a trip.

MR. EMEABA: Oh, whoever is closer. Keith?

MR. NICHOLSON: Keith or Wallace, are you close enough to the Alagasco offices to oversee that?

MR. JONES: I'm sorry, were you all talking to Wallace?

MR. NICHOLSON: Yeah.

MR. JONES: I was on -- had another call come in.

MR. NICHOLSON: Yeah, either of you, Wallace or Keith.

MR. JONES: Okay. Yeah, one of us could go to Birmingham. When are we talking about doing that?

MR. NICHOLSON: Yeah, how long of a drive is that for you? I don’t know if that's necessary. How far is that?

MR. BLACKWOOD: It's an hour for me.

MR. JONES: Yeah, about an hour and a half for me too.

MR. CHHATRE: If you guys don't mind doing it, that's

fine, just to keep the legality side off a little bit. We really have no issue Alagasco is sending it to us, but if you guys are (indiscernible) might as well do it.

MR. JONES: Can you run down there?

MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. Well, we can work the coordination out, I think, after this interview, so --

MR. GARDNER: May I ask a question?

MR. NICHOLSON: Sure.

MR. GARDNER: Just to be clear, someone from the PSC will witness me extracting it from the pod, and then what is the protocol from your perspective of what to do next?

MR. NICHOLSON: Pack it up and send it to us.

MR. GARDNER: I mean, I know I'm asking an obvious question, but I want to make sure that I do as you would want us to do. So you want Keith or Wallace to witness me putting it in a box and taping the box up as well?

MR. NICHOLSON: Yes. As long as they're there, they might as well --

MR. GARDNER: Okay.

MR. NICHOLSON: -- do everything, yep. They're essentially acting on our behalf.

MR. GARDNER: Okay. I just wanted to make sure I understood.

MR. NICHOLSON: Yes. Yeah, that's it.

MR. GARDNER: Okay.

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. Now going back again to the morning of the accident, can you tell us how far the office is from your residence?

A. I'm sorry, I didn't understand what you were asking.

Q. Okay, I guess, you were called in while you're asleep and asked to report because of the explosion. And my question is, you said you went to the office, and how far is the office from home?

A. Approximately 40 miles one way.

Q. Okay. So you're looking at about an hour's drive?

A. Depending on traffic anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour.

Q. Okay. And how long it took you from the office to go back to the accident scene?

A. I want to -- around 20 minutes, give or take a little bit.

Q. Okay. So roughly, do you recall what time you were at the accident scene? If you don't, you --

A. Sorry, I couldn't understand you.

Q. Do you know what time you arrived at the explosion site or accident scene?

A. Between 4:45 and 5:00.

Q. Okay. And was there enough light for you to do what you were doing?

A. It was dark when we got there. We all had flashlights

that were on our hard hats.

Q. Okay.

A. And we had handheld flashlights and lights from the trucks.

Q. Okay. Now, when you finished your initial assignment and went on to put the clamp on, do you know approximate time?

A. No, sir, I don't recall the time.

Q. Okay. Was the daylight breaking out or you still were wearing your hard hat lights?

A. It was daylight.

Q. Okay.

A. It was early daylight, but I don't recall the time.

Q. Okay, that is fine. And do you recall seeing the digging of the trench or you -- when you went there the trench already was there and the pipe was exposed?

A. I'm sorry, can you repeat the question?

Q. Sure. When you went to put the clamp on, did you witness the trench being dug or the trench was already there and the pipe was exposed when you went?

A. I had abandoned the service running to the building to take the gas off of that service.

Q. Right.

A. And as I got up from that, they had just put the backhoe in the ground to start digging --

Q. Okay.

A. -- and since I had my PPE on, we started digging from there and I was spotting and probing with the sharpshooter shovel to get the depth of the main to keep from hitting it.

Q. Okay. So you were actually there from the get-go. Can you tell us, roughly, was the root the same size as the pipe or was it smaller or larger, in your opinion?

A. I don't recall the exact size, but it was very similar to the size of the main in the ground.

Q. Okay. And did you try to pull the root physically yourself before the bucket?

A. Can you repeat the question, please?

Q. Sure. Did you try to pull the root away from the pipe yourself before the backhoe bucket, I guess, helped you get it out?

A. Yes, sir, I tried by hand and then I tried with a shovel. I could not get the root to budge, and at that point I had Dan to use the backhoe to assist.

Q. Okay. Now, can you tell how tight the root was around the pipe at that location with the rock?

A. I couldn't get my shovel in between the rock and main or the root and main.

Q. Oh, okay. Do you think the pipe -- could you see the pipe at that time? Was there enough light for you to see the pipe and the root?

A. Yes, sir, there was enough light at that point.

Q. Okay. And could you smell the gas at that time?
A. I had my breathing mask on so I couldn't smell anything.
Q. Do you recall --
A. I had --
MR. NICHOLSON: Go ahead and finish. What was that Cameron?
MR. HYCHE: Sir?
MR. NICHOLSON: It sounded like Ravi cut you off.
MR. CHHATRE: Yeah, go ahead.
MR. NICHOLSON: Go ahead and finish.
MR. BELL: He was worried that he cut you off. But go ahead and finish the question about did you have enough light, I think is the last question.
MR. CHHATRE: No, the question --
MR. HYCHE: I had enough light to see that morning, and then the next question was whether I could smell the gas or not. I had my supplied air breathing mask on; I couldn't smell gas or anything.
MR. CHHATRE:
Q. How difficult was it to work with your gear on?
A. Sir, I couldn't understand you.
Q. How difficult was it for you to work with all your gear on and the breathing apparatus on? Could you move freely?
A. Yes, sir, I could move freely. It wasn't difficult. I had plenty of room in that excavation.

Q. Okay.

MR. GARDNER: Point out that you're in one of the -- in fact, Ravi, he's in one of these photographs. You can see him on the 2681.

MR. CHHATRE: I can (indiscernible).

MR. HYCHE: Do you have picture 2681?

MR. CHHATRE: Yeah.

MR. HYCHE: You can -- the top left picture, you can see me within the trench.

MR. CHHATRE: Oh, okay.

MR. HYCHE: Holding a shovel with my breathing equipment. And the bottom picture, I'm kneeled over cleaning the main --

MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

MR. HYCHE: -- with my equipment on.

MR. CHHATRE: That's all I have. Thank you so much.

MR. NICHOLSON: Kelly?

BY MR. EMEABA:

Q. This is Kelly Emeaba. My question to Mr. Cameron is, I looked at the picture that is schematically drawn, which is 002684. Do you think this is an accurate representation of the movement of the root over the pipeline?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Okay. If this were to be the close or exact representation of this root, how do you think you were going to

remove this root from the pipe with your hand, pulling it?

A. Sorry, I didn't understand the question. Will you repeat, please?

Q. Yes. You answered that this is an exact schematic representation of the root movement over the pipe, and my question to you is, if this root went through this pipe as drawn here, how will you ever -- how do you think you'll be able to remove this root from this pipe if not cut?

A. Well, I was -- I tried by hand hoping that the root was rotten or wasn't a strong root, and then I tried to pry it with a shovel hoping that maybe some leverage would help me. At that point I couldn't -- I realized I couldn't get it and I needed the assistance of the backhoe.

Q. Okay. Within this I can see, based on the drawing that we have here, at least we can see about two -- I mean, three positions on top, that it actually made over three turns on this pipe. Where within these three turns on top were you holding or you grabbed to actually pull it out?

A. Again, this is not to scale, so the root was a little longer before it made the wrap. About a foot away from the rock is where we grabbed it with the backhoe and broke it.

Q. Okay. So how many sections did you have to break it in order to remove the root --

A. Just broke the one.

Q. Just in one position?

A. Just broke one section to get it out.

Q. So you broke it in one section and what then did you do? Because it would not have fallen down by itself after you break it by one section. The fact that --

A. The backhoe grabbed it and separated it. He picked it up, which made it pivot at the back, and I twisted it to break it off and I tossed it on the bank to get it out of my way.

Q. Okay. So if you were able to cut it in one section and was able to remove it, why was the root now in pieces as we can actually examine them in these pictures? Because if it's one cut and you were able to untangle it out of the root, was it deliberately cut into pieces and what reason?

MR. NICHOLSON: What picture are you looking at?

MR. EMEABA: If you're looking at 83, 022683.

BY MR. EMEABA:

Q. So my question is, if you were able to cut it in one section and untangle it from the pipe, the picture taken on 12/18/2013, why was it now in pieces as you observe here?

A. Those pictures were taken on the second day. I was not there the second day.

Q. Okay. Do you know the person who could have cut it in pieces?

A. I was not out there. I do not know who partook in what activities out there.

MR. NICHOLSON: So I think what they said earlier, and

you guys can chime in, Alagasco, was that those pictures don't depict the root directly over the leak. I think those are pictures of root elsewhere on the pipeline that were cut after the accident.

MR. EMEABA: So more or less --

MR. GALLAGHER: Yes, this is David. That's correct. When we were going to put in the plastic to cut that piece of cast iron out to replace it with plastic, they cut the root off the top of the main because it was going in both directions and they cut it off so they could cut the cast iron pipe out and we could put the plastic in. And that was day 2.

MR. EMEABA: Okay.

BY MR. EMEABA:

Q. Mr. Cameron, are you qualified to work on pipeline unsupervised?

A. Can you repeat the question, please?

Q. Are you qualified to work on pipeline unsupervised?

A. The morning of the accident I had to be under the supervision of my journeyman, which was Dan Ingram that morning, and he was the one operating, instructing me on what to do.

Q. Okay. If the foreman, journeyman was not there, could you have worked on the pipeline unsupervised?

A. That morning I could not have. I would have to have had a journeyman present, and because my journeyman was present I was able to do so.

Q. Who is your journeyman, please?
A. That morning it was Dan Ingram.
Q. Okay. Where was he when you were removing this root?
A. He was on the backhoe. I was instructing him how far to bring the backhoe bucket down to keep from hitting the main but would be able to remove the root.
Q. So as a backhoe operator, do you think he actually observed what you were doing and he wasn't busy operating the backhoe?
A. Can you repeat the question, please?
Q. As a backhoe operator that your foreman is, are you sure he was observing you directly and he was not busy operating the backhoe itself?
A. The only time the backhoe bucket was being operated, Dan was operating it under my guidelines to keep it off the main and then the bucket was set to the side and he was watching me from the backhoe seat while I done my work.
Q. Okay. Currently or at the time of the accident, what activities on the gas pipeline may you not perform?
A. Will you repeat the question, please?
Q. At the time of the accident, what activities, task, covered task on the pipeline may you not perform?
A. Under the supervision of my journeyman I could have done whatever he requested me to do.
Q. Okay. So were you qualified for any covered task on the

pipeline at all at the time of the accident?

A. Will you repeat that question, please?

Q. Were you qualified for any covered task at all at the time of the accident?

A. I was OQ qualified, or operator qualified, through our gas company.

Q. Okay. What activities were you OQ qualified?

A. I don't have a list on everything I'm OQ qualified to do.

Q. Do you --

A. Or I don't have it with me.

Q. Okay. Based on the activities you were performing, can you tell us some of the OQ qualifications you already received prior to the accident or on the day of the accident?

MR. GARDNER: This is Bob. If you're taking a list of what covered tasks Cameron had received at the time of the accident, if I understand the question correctly, we can provide that to you. We just don't have it in front of us.

MR. NICHOLSON: Yeah, why don't we just do that.

MR. GARDNER: He doesn't have it from memory.

MR. NICHOLSON: Yeah, I think that's fine.

MR. EMEABA: Okay.

MR. NICHOLSON: Why don't you make that a request, Bob, or Kelly.

MR. EMEABA: Some of his OQ tasks on that day.

MR. NICHOLSON: That's for December 2013.

MR. EMEABA: Okay. Thank you --

MR. GARDNER: I'm sorry, could you repeat that? I apologize.

MR. NICHOLSON: Why don't you state your request, Kelly.

MR. EMEABA: No. My request is to send us the OQ or covered task that Mr. Cameron was qualified on the day of the accident.

MR. GARDNER: We can do that and we will.

MR. EMEABA: Thank you. Back to Matt Nicholson.

MR. NICHOLSON: Okay, PSC, Wallace, Keith, you got any questions?

MR. JONES: No, I don't have any now.

MR. BLACKWOOD: No, I don't have any.

MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. Bob, did you have any questions? Alagasco?

MR. GARDNER: Yes.

BY MR. GARDNER:

Q. Yes, Cameron, could you describe the location of the leak and what you observed about the location of the leak prior to putting the repair clamp on it?

A. Between the diagram and between page --

MR. NICHOLSON: What are we looking at, 2684?

MR. GARDNER: Yes, sir.

MR. HYCHE: The rock was on the top of the main,

sandwiched between the root and the main. And the break was directly up under it at an angle. So if it was a clock, it would have been at 5:00 and the rock would have been around the 11:00. The break where the gas was escaping was maybe a quarter to half inch, half inch long. It was not broke all the way around. There was not gas escaping anywhere but that one concentrated area.

BY MR. NICHOLSON:

Q. Okay. So we're saying --

A. And if you go to page --

Q. I'm sorry, I want to back up. You're saying it was a quarter to a half-inch circumferential break at the 5:00 position?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. And in this cross-section view on your schematic 2684, which -- what are we looking at? Are we going -- are we looking east or west?

MR. GARDNER: Is the question, which direction are we looking at with this?

MR. NICHOLSON: Yeah, I just want to be clear.

MR. HYCHE: The cross-section view is east to west.

BY MR. NICHOLSON:

Q. But I'm looking west in this view or am I looking -- which side is the apartment on? Is it to the right or the left of the trench?

A. To the right. The apartment is to the right.

Q. Okay.

MR. CHHATRE: This is east.
MR. NICHOLSON: Looking east, yeah. No, no it's looking west.
MR. HYCHE: If you go to page 2680 --
MR. NICHOLSON: Oh, no, you're right, east.
Yep.
MR. HYCHE: -- where the box with area of leak and the red arrow pointing to the water, you see where the water is agitated?
MR. NICHOLSON: Yeah.
MR. HYCHE: That is where the leak was blowing towards.
MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. Okay.
MR. HYCHE: That's not soap, that's just froth from the water being stirred up.
MR. CHHATRE: Right, right.
BY MR. NICHOLSON: Go ahead, Bob; did you have anything else?
MR. GARDNER: I do not. Thank you.
MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. I've got a few follow-up questions for you, Cameron.
BY MR. NICHOLSON:
Q. You said you did a little work to install the clamp. Can you tell us what kind of work had to be done to the pipe before you put the clamp on?
A. Yes, sir. That morning when we got -- the root was

removed, the rock was removed, I was able to take a scraper and -- just a paint scraper, and run it up and down the pipe to remove the majority of the dirt and smooth it out. And then I took soap with a paint brush and scrubbed the main to remove all the loose dirt that the scraper wouldn't get and I put the clamp around it, which was -- I centered the leak with the repair clamp. I used an impact to run the nuts up on the bolt to tighten it down and I finished with a box ratchet to get it tight enough for the leak to quit.

Q. So I thought -- when we were out there we had heard that a mill file was used and a hammer. Is that -- neither of those were stated just now. Were you using a mill file?

A. There was a file in the hole. I had the file and the hammer because I was not sure of the condition of the hole -- or the main was going to be, but I just used the scraper.

Q. Does that mean that the dirt was coming off fairly easily?

A. Yes, sir, that main cleaned up real easy.

Q. Okay. And so, was there a dirt ball or anything stuck to this leak and built up around it?

A. No, sir, no dust ball, no evidence of any frost. The only thing that stood out was the root and the rock.

Q. Okay. And on that note, had you ever seen anything like this before on a cast iron main in your experience; have you seen a root wrapped around a main?

A. Yes, sir, I've seen it one or two other times.
Q. And was that main cracked or leaking?
A. It had -- the one leak I can recall where the root was around it, the shifting of the tree, because it was right up under the tree, had managed to loosen a coupling --
Q. Okay.
A. -- and it was leaking. We cut the root out of the way and retightened the coupling to repair the leak.
Q. Now, was it similar, was it coiled around the pipe in that other instance; do you recall?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Okay. And then just to be clear on your -- on the sketch that was submitted to us, 2684, that sketch or that schematic was created based on testimony or discussions you had with Alagasco; is that true?
A. Yes, sir. I testified and wrote on a dry erase board what I saw in the excavation and they had this schematic drawn up, which is representative of what I saw.
Q. Okay. So in this photograph we were talking about, or this schematic, I'm sorry, where you have the side view in the bottom right corner, it does show -- it shows the root in sort of a helical fashion going over and under, and I just want to be clear that, in fact, you observed the root coming not only over the pipe but back beneath the pipe and over again. Is that --
A. Yes, sir.

Q. Okay. Was there any clearance around that root? Was it -- had it pushed dirt away or was the pipe supported?

A. There was no dirt between the rock and the root. I tried to get a shovel between the main and the rock -- I mean, the main and the root and I couldn't get anything in between them to try and get them apart.

Q. Okay. I want to go back a little bit. You mentioned plugging the service line off the main. Tell me again, why was that done and how did you accomplish it?

A. It was done in the interest of safety, to take the gas away from the building off of the riser. And we -- I suited up with my PPE to catch gas. I took a pair of four-wheel cutters and cut a foot-long section out of an inch and a quarter steel service. I put an expansion plug in it, threaded it and capped it.

Q. So was there not a curb valve located there where you were digging?

A. Not where we were digging, not the section we dug up.

Q. Was there a curb valve anywhere on that service line off the main?

A. Our prints on MAGI mobile where we were looking that morning did not show any curb valve.

Q. Okay. What about the service line print?

A. I couldn't find any records that morning on that particular address.

MR. NICHOLSON: Well, okay, so I've got a service line print, Bob, that you gave us, and I believe it shows a curb valve. I'm trying to figure out was that ever identified or not?

MR. GARDNER: We'll let David explain that because he was more familiar with it, if that's okay?

MR. GALLAGHER: Matt, we never uncovered it. And once we abandoned the service, the hole that they dug, we just dug a hole and cut the pipe and we never exposed the service cock that was on that line. I believe it was -- said it was about 19 feet off the main possibly We never uncovered that and we just cut the pipe. And then from that point, I think when Kelly got there we tested the service and we did remove the service cock from the Building 80 and also 79 because from the heat they were leaking around the core. We screwed them off and put caps on there to complete the service test.

MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. Thanks for that.

BY MR. NICHOLSON:

Q. And then just to go back one more time, Cameron, when you were -- when the root finally got cut on the top of the pipe, did you -- were you able to hear more gas escape? Was there any sense that maybe this crack opened up more or there was a greater leak?

A. No, sir. I laid my eyes on it before I ever had Dan bring the backhoe bucket into the excavation to remove the root. And I had earplugs in so I couldn't hear --

Q. Okay.

A. -- a difference. But looking at it prior to him removing the root and after the root there was no change; it didn't open up the break or anything.

Q. Okay. That's all --

A. Going back, going back to your --

Q. Yes?

A. Going back to your previous question about the service and about the service print that was there?

Q. Yes.

A. We dug two lines up that morning and one of the service men had pulled up a service print but it was in the old line. When I cut it, it was already dead. The new -- the live line we dug up, I never saw a service print for it.

Q. Okay. When you say it was already dead, are we talking about you dug up an abandoned line or are you talking about the line that was capped at the meter, at the riser?

A. It was already an abandoned line.

Q. Okay.

A. It was the old one, I guess one of the original ones they ran.

Q. Okay. All right.

A. It was no longer in use.

Q. Okay. Thanks.

MR. NICHOLSON: Ravi?

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. Hi, this is Ravi. One quick question here on your sketch 2684, 2-6-8-4 --

MR. GARDNER: Ravi, can you wait just a second. I'll -- ran to go to the restroom. Do you mind waiting just a second?

MR. CHHATRE: I can wait.

MR. NICHOLSON: Let's go off record then. Off the record.

(Off the record.)

(On the record.)

MR. NICHOLSON: Back on the record.

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. Hi, this is Ravi, and I'm referencing to 2684. All I'm asking is which way is the sewer main connection coming from the building?

MR. NICHOLSON: Which one? For the bottom right?

MR. CHHATRE: Right.

MR. NICHOLSON: In the bottom right schematic.

MR. HYCHE: That I can't answer. I don't know the answer to that.

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. Okay. At least on this one, on this side view, are we looking towards the building?

A. That schematic is just to show how the root wrapped around the main. It's not orientated in any direction.

Q. Okay. That's fine. And that's all I have. By the way, all the sketches really helped. They're nicely done.

A. Thank you.

MR. NICHOLSON: Kelly, anything else?

MR. EMEABA: No, nothing.

MR. NICHOLSON: Nothing. Wallace, Keith, anything you want to follow up on?

MR. JONES: No, not now. I think we got all our questions answered too.

MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. Bob, Alagasco, any other questions?

MR. GARDNER: No other questions.

MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. I don't think there's anything else here. So at this time, Cameron, I think we'll conclude the interview. We'll go off record. Off the record.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

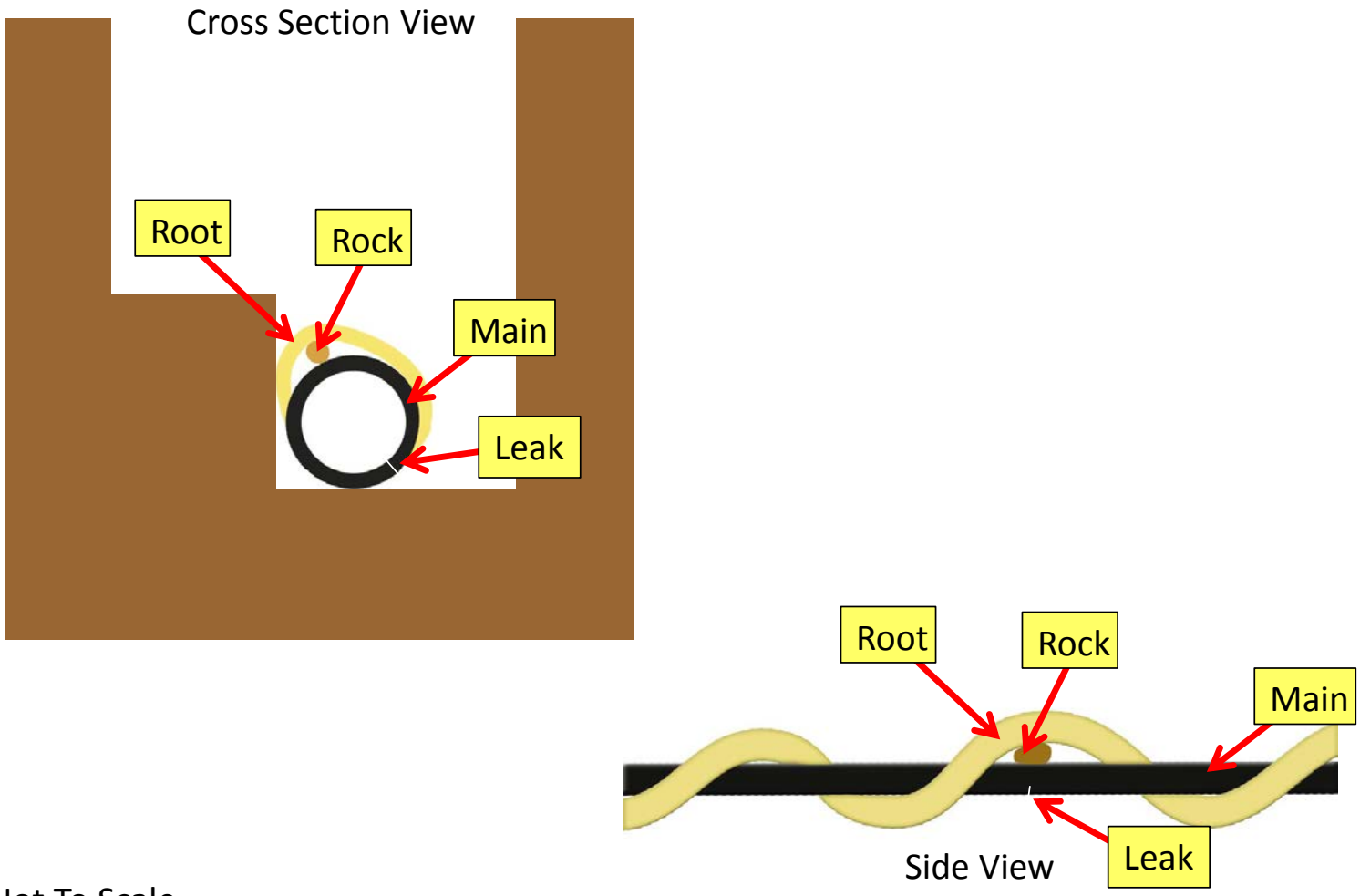
IN THE MATTER OF:	ALABAMA GAS CORPORATION (ALAGASCO) NATURAL GAS RELEASE WITH IGNITION BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA DECEMBER 17, 2013 Interview of Cameron Hyche
DOCKET NUMBER:	DCA-14-MP-001
PLACE:	Washington, D.C.
DATE:	September 4, 2014

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.

_____

Michelle Smiroldo
Transcriber

Relationship of Root, Rock and Main



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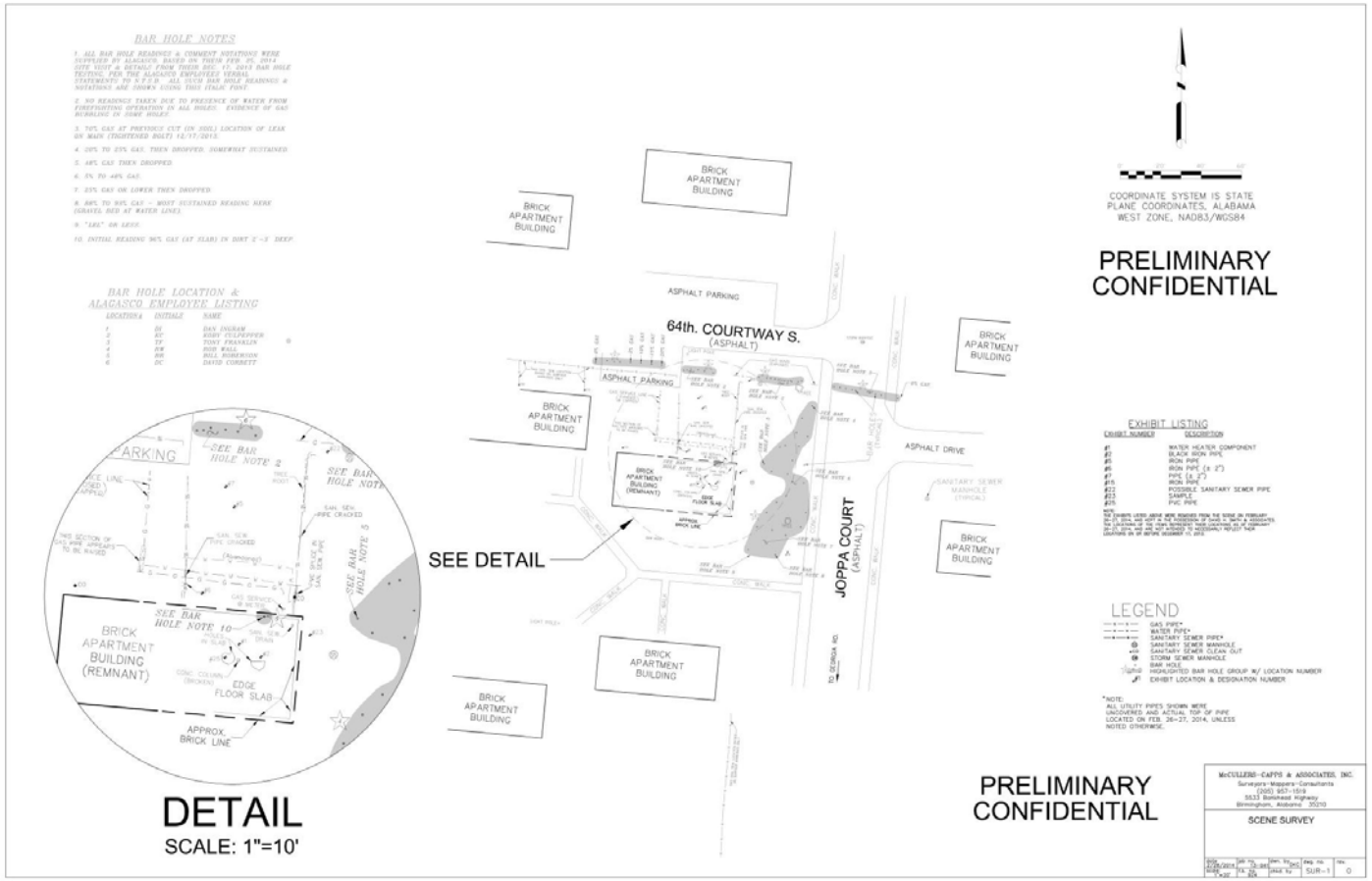
BAR HOLE NOTES
BAR HOLE LOCATION & ALAGASCO EMPLOYEE LISTING
BRICK APARTMENT BUILDING
ASPHALT PARKING
64th. COURTWAY S.
(ASPHALT)
ASPHALT DRIVE
JOPPA COURT
(ASPHALT)
SEE DETAIL
BRICK APARTMENT BUILDING (REMNANT)
EDGE FLOOR SLAB
APPROX. BRICK LINE
SEE BAR HOLE NOTE 10
DETAIL
SCALE: 1"=10'
COORDINATE SYSTEM IS STATE PLANE COORDINATES, ALABAMA WEST ZONE, NAD83/WGS84
PRELIMINARY CONFIDENTIAL
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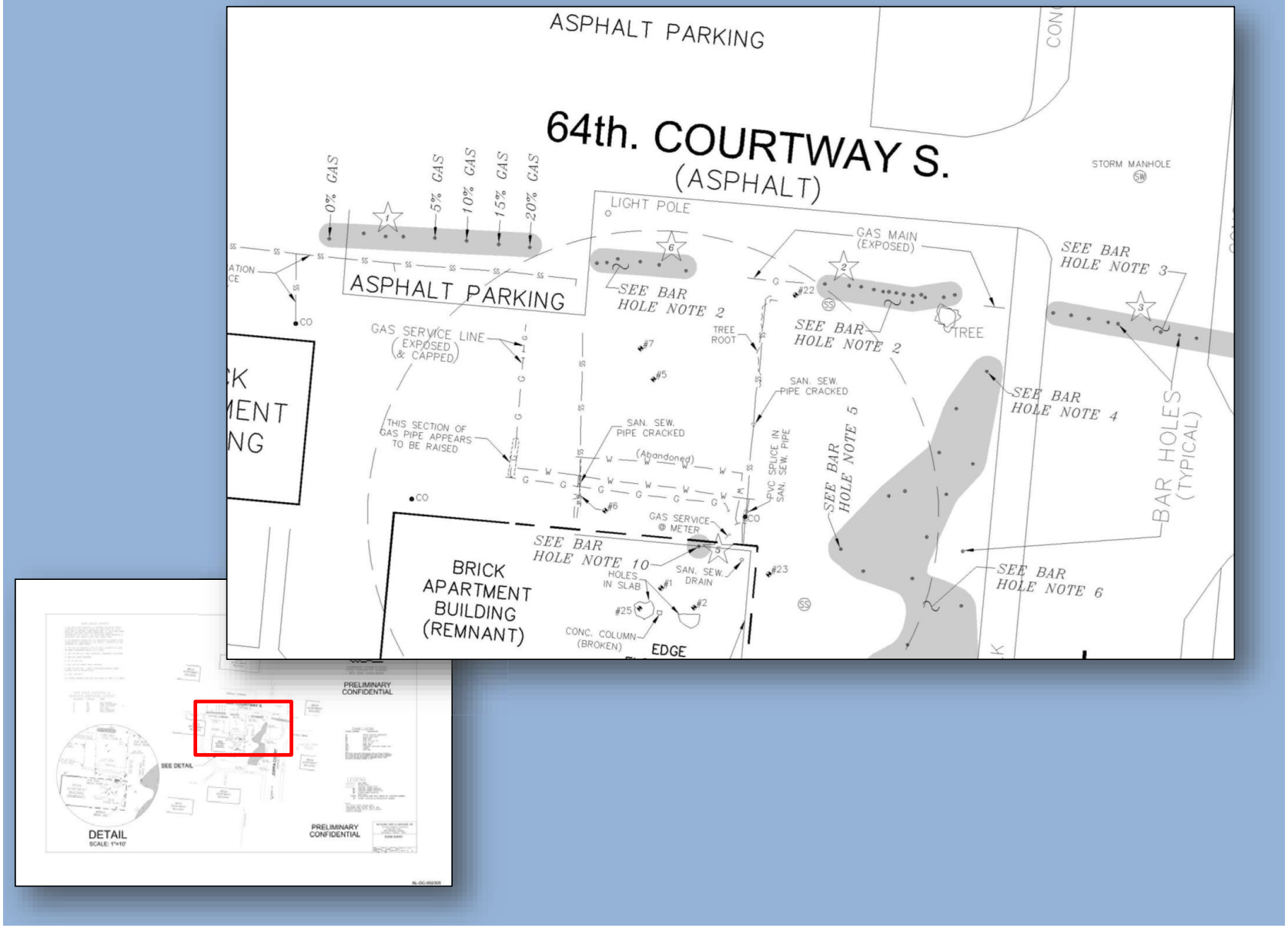
McCULLERS-CAPPS & ASSOCIATES, INC.
SCENE SURVEY

AL-GC-002305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(ASPHALT)
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& CAPPED)
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(Abandoned)
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GAS PIPE APPEARS
TO BE RAISED
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SAN. SEW. PIPE
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BRICK
APARTMENT
BUILDING
(REMNANT)
HOLES
IN SLAB
SAN. SEW.
DRAIN
CONC. COLUMN
(BROKEN)
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BAR HOLES
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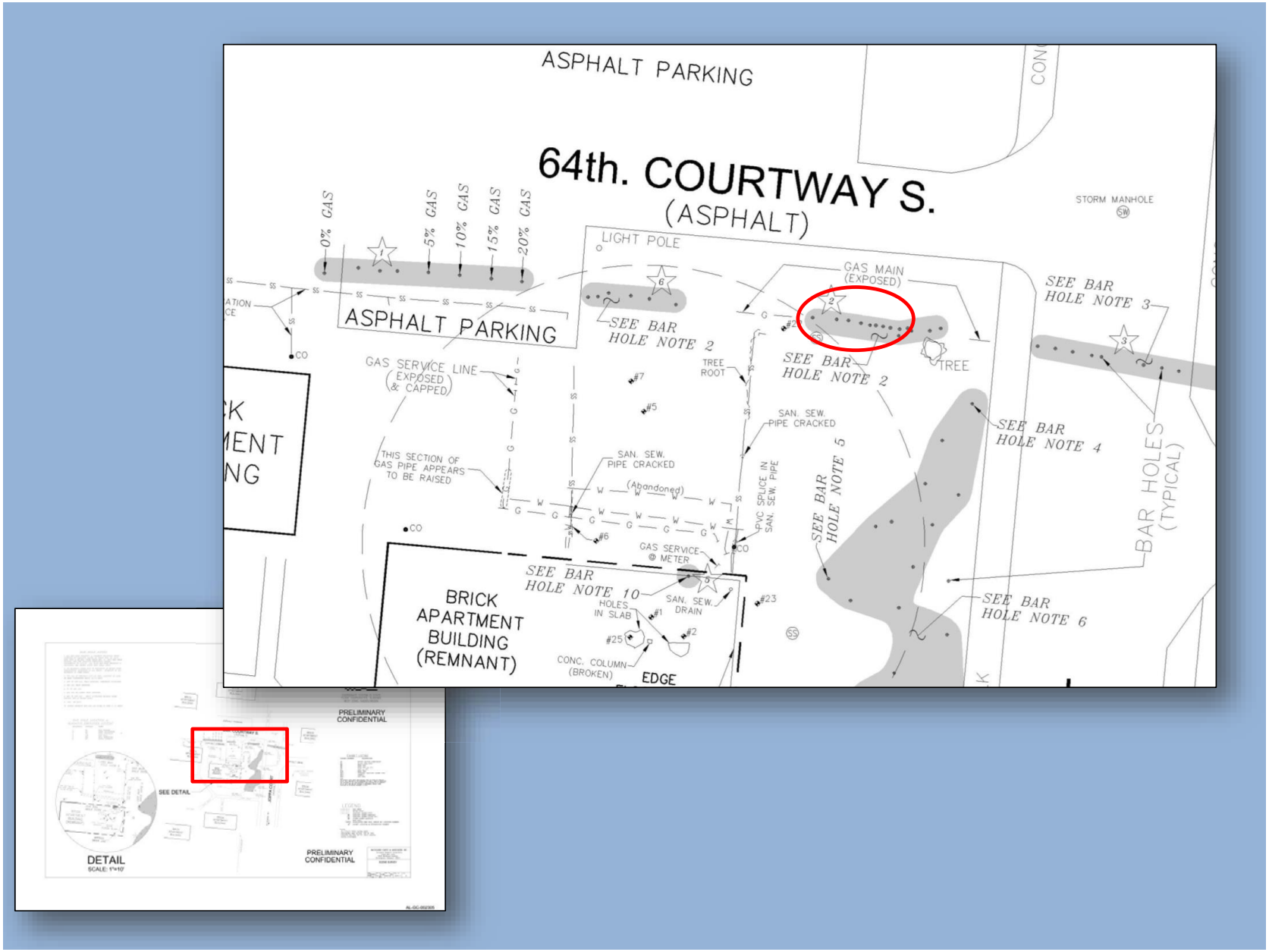
ASPHALT PARKING
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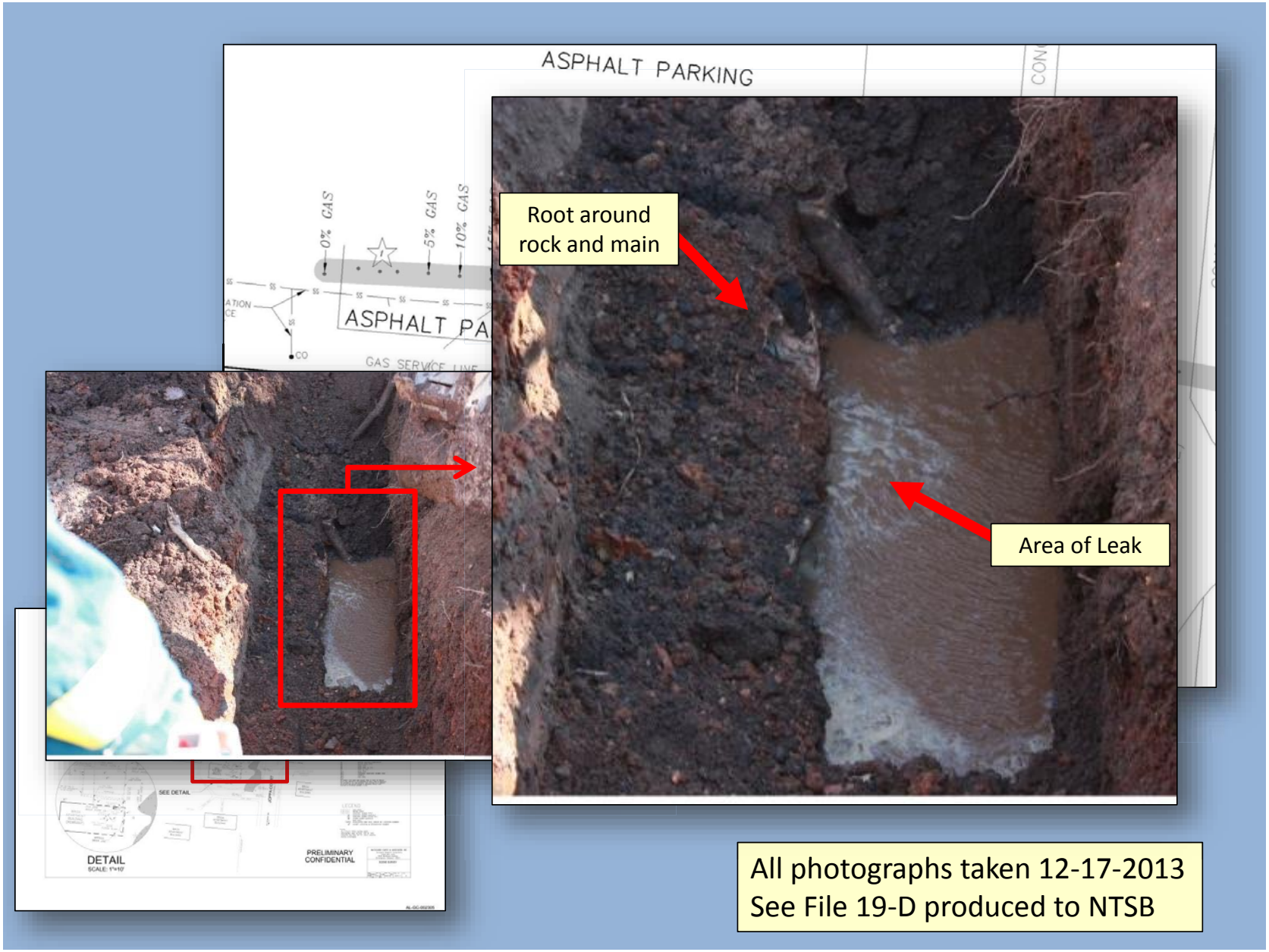
AL-GC-002679



All photographs taken 12-17-2013
See File 19-D produced to NTSB

AL-GC-002680

All photographs taken 12-17-2013
See File 19-D produced to NTSB

AL-GC-002681

All photographs taken 12-17-2013
See File 19-A produced to NTSB


Tree
Area of Leak
tree
leak
leak
tree
leak
tree
PARKING
(ASPHALT)
STORM MANHOLE
GAS MAIN
(EXPOSED)
SEE BAR
HOLE NOTE 2
SEE BAR
HOLE NOTE 3
SERVICE LINE
EXPOSED
CAPPED
TREE
ROOT
SAN. SEW.
PIPE CRACKED
(Abandoned)
(REMNANT)
CONC. COLUMN
(BROKEN)
DETAIL
AL-GC-MO-000405
AL-GC-MO-000406
AL-GC-MO-000408
AL-GC-MO-000411
AL-GC-MO-000415
AL-GC-MO-000410
AL-GC-MO-000413
All photographs taken 12-18-2013
See File 19-J produced to NTSB

AL-GC-002683