

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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ALABAMA GAS CORPORATION (ALAGASCO) *

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

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA *

DECEMBER 17, 2013 *

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

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: MATTHEW NICHOLSON
Investigator-in-Charge

APPEARANCES:

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WALLACE JONES, Gas Pipeline Safety Administrator
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Mayor's Office of Citizens Assistance
Birmingham, Alabama

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Birmingham Police Department

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I N T E R V I E W

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

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

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

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

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

23 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay, terrific.

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

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

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

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

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

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

11 MR. JONES: Wallace Jones, W-a-l-l-a-c-e, J-o-n-e-s.
12 I'm the Administrator of Gas Pipeline Safety for the Alabama
13 Public Service Commission. Business phone is 3 [REDACTED]. And
14 business e-mail is [REDACTED].

15 MR. CHHATRE: I'm Ravi Chhatre. That's R-a-v-i, last
16 name Chhatre, C-h-h-a-t-r-e. I'm accident investigator with NTSB.
17 My work phone is [REDACTED]. E-mail is
18 [REDACTED].

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

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

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

25 MS. HOLMES: Yes.

1 INTERVIEW OF LAKENYA BEND and LATONYA HOLMES:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

13 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay.

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

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

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

1 separate?

2 MS. HOLMES: It's separate.

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

7 MS. HOLMES: Yeah, individual meters.

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

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

11 MS. HOLMES: To the gas company.

12 MS. BEND: To the gas company

13 MR. NICHOLSON: To Alagasco, okay.

14 MS. BEND: Yes.

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

18 MS. HOLMES: I would not know that.

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

20 MR. NICHOLSON: Before your time.

21 MS. BEND: Yeah.

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

25 MS. HOLMES: That's correct.

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

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

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

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

8 MR. NICHOLSON: Right.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 MS. HOLMES: Um-hum.

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

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

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

9 MS. HOLMES: Um-hum.

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

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

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

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

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

1 MS. HOLMES: Yeah, typically they will.

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

4 MS. HOLMES: Yes.

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

9 MS. BEND: Any maintenance?

10 MR. NICHOLSON: Any type of internal work?

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

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

15 MS. HOLMES: Yes.

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

19 MS. HOLMES: No. No.

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

22 MS. HOLMES: That's correct.

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

25 MS. HOLMES: Yes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 it again.

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

4 MR. CHHATRE: Contact information?

5 MS. HOLMES: [REDACTED]. E-mail address is
6 [REDACTED].

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

9 MS. HOLMES: April of 2013.

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

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

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

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

18 MS. HOLMES: 500 units.

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

20 MS. BEND: 500 individual apartment units.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

16 MS. BEND: In 1952?

17 MR. CHHATRE: Yeah. No. Okay.

18 MS. BEND: That pre-dates me.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

22 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay.

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

1 least for the last 5 years.

2 MS. BEND: Okay.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

20 MR. CHHATRE: They will do it?

21 MS. BEND: Um-hum.

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

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

3 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Are maintained properly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

9 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

10 MS. BEND: Correct. Correct.

11 MR. CHHATRE: Good. That helps.

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

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

21 MS. HOLMES: Right.

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

23 MS. HOLMES: Right. I haven't received any complaints.

24 We have to have information on everybody that's living in the
25 household because the rent is based on your income. So we need

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

24 MS. HOLMES: That's correct.

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

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

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

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

7 MS. HOLMES: Um-hum.

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

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

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

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

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

1 MS. HOLMES: No, no.

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

10 MS. HOLMES: No.

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

13 MS. HOLMES: Right.

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

15 MS. HOLMES: Yeah.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

14 MR. GALLAGHER: Oh, okay.

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

16 MR. GALLAGHER: I understand.

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

18 MS. HOLMES: Erosion, yeah.

19 MR. GALLAGHER: Okay.

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

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

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

1 walking, not on the sidewalks --

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

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

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

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

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

14 MS. HOLMES: No.

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

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

20 MS. HOLMES: Okay.

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

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

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

9 MR. NICHOLSON: Oh, okay, good.

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

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

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

18 MR. NICHOLSON: The inserts, yeah.

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

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

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

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

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

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

8 MR. LUPO: I'll get those.

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

11 MR. JONES: That's fine.

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

14 MR. NICHOLSON: Terrific.

15 MR. CHHATRE: Wonderful.

16 MR. NICHOLSON: Great.

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

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

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

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

1 potential -- okay.

2 MS. HOLMES: No.

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

5 MR. CHHATRE: Your turn.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6 (Outside interruption.)

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

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

13 MS. HOLMES: I'm sorry?

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

15 MS. HOLMES: Inside the house?

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

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

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

24 MS. HOLMES: Correct.

25 MR. GALLAGHER: On behalf of the customers?

1 MS. HOLMES: That's correct.

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

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

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

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

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

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

22 MS. HOLMES: No.

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

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

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

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

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

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

7 Thanks. Anything else?

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Nope.

9 MR. NICHOLSON: No?

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

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

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

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

22 MS. HOLMES: No.

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

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

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

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

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

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

8 MR. CHHATRE: Yes.

9 MS. HOLMES: Yes.

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

11 MS. HOLMES: Yes.

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

15 MS. HOLMES: To the residents, no.

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

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

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

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

1 MS. HOLMES: No, no.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

16 MR. NICHOLSON: Wallace, anything?

17 MR. JONES: No.

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

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

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

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

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

10 MS. HOLMES: Yes.

11 MR. JONES: And individual meters.

12 MR. NICHOLSON: Yeah, I saw that.

13 MR. JONES: Okay.

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

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

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

23 MS. HOLMES: Yes.

24 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Good.

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

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

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

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

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

13 MS. HOLMES: It was a five bedroom.

14 MS. BEND: It was a five bedroom.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7 Anything else? Police?

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

10 MS. HOLMES: Thank you.

11 MS. BEND: Okay. Thank you.

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

14 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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

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PLACE: Birmingham, Alabama

DATE: December 20, 2013

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
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Cynthia P. Gallagher
Transcriber