

## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

\* \* \* \* \*

Investigation of:

\*

\*

ALABAMA GAS CORPORATION (ALAGASCO) \*

NATURAL GAS LEAK WITH IGNITION \*

Docket No.: DCA-14-MP-001

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA \*

DECEMBER 17, 2013 \*

\*

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: JOHN WHITMER

Station No. 12

Birmingham, Alabama

Sunday,

December 22, 2013

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: MATTHEW NICHOLSON

Investigator-in-Charge

## APPEARANCES:

MATTHEW NICHOLSON, Investigator-in-Charge  
Office of Railroad, Pipeline and Hazardous  
Materials Investigations  
National Transportation Safety Board  
490 L'Enfant Plaza East, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20594

---

RAVI CHHATRE, Accident Investigator  
Office of Railroad, Pipeline and Hazardous  
Material Investigations  
National Transportation Safety Board

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

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

KEITH BLACKWOOD, Pipeline Safety Investigator  
Alabama Public Service Commission

CAPT. WILLIE WILLIAMS  
LT. RAPHAEL HALE  
(Representatives on behalf of Chief Whitmer)

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>I N D E X</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of John Whitmer:		
By Mr. Nicholson		5
By Mr. Chhatre		45
By Mr. Nicholson		66
By Mr. Blackwood		72



1 I'll begin and go to my left. My name Matthew Nicholson. I'm a  
2 NTSB investigator.

3 MR. CHHATRE: Ravi Chhatre, NTSB investigator.

4 MR. BLACKWOOD: Keith Blackwood, Alabama Public Service  
5 Commission.

6 CAPT. WILLIAMS: Willie Williams, fire investigator,  
7 City of Birmingham.

8 LT. HALE: Rafael Hale, fire investigator, City of  
9 Birmingham.

10 MR. GARDNER: Bob Gardner, Alabama Gas.

11 MR. LUPO: Don Lupo, City of Birmingham.

12 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. Good.

13 INTERVIEW OF JOHN WHITMER

14 BY MR. NICHOLSON:

15 Q. John, maybe just to begin with, if you could tell us a  
16 little bit about how long you've been at the station and some of  
17 your responsibilities?

18 A. Okay. Well, I've been with the Birmingham Fire and  
19 Rescue 23 years. I've been in the position of a Battalion Chief  
20 for 3 years working in Battalion 3, which it encompasses seven  
21 fire stations in the Woodlawn-East Lake-Airport area, central  
22 Birmingham.

23 Q. Okay. And you were called out on the night -- or the  
24 morning of the 17th to respond to the explosion?

25 A. That's correct.

1 Q. Okay. And do you remember when you got that call to  
2 respond?

3 A. I didn't look immediately at the clock. I knew that it  
4 was approximately 2:45 in the morning. I noticed from the records  
5 that the call actually came in at 2:30.

6 Q. Okay. So the call came in from -- where would you have  
7 gotten the call from? Where would the station get the call from?  
8 The dispatch center, 911?

9 A. That's correct, yes.

10 Q. Okay. And, I'm sorry, you said that came in at 2:30?

11 A. I believe the dispatch time was 2- --

12 Q. You've got the records.

13 A. Right. The records show 2:31 in the morning.

14 Q. Okay. So that would be the first call to the station?  
15 Where does that go to?

16 A. The initial 911 calls, of course, they go straight to  
17 our dispatch. Well, I don't have access to when the calls came  
18 into the dispatch center.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. All we have is when dispatch notifies the individual  
21 stations, when we're -- we call it toned out.

22 Q. Okay. And that's what the 2:30 a.m. is?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Okay. And so when the station's then toned out at 2:31,  
25 you were notified 14 minutes later. Is that what you said? The

1 2:45 a.m. was what?

2 A. No, no, no. I was just looking down the narrative. We  
3 were notified -- our, our first arriving company on the scene was  
4 2:34.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. So I'm just guessing, I don't think this narrative is  
7 complete. The initial dispatch was probably at 0230.

8 Q. Okay. You're just guessing by the transit time  
9 between --

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Okay. And this is the station that responded, the  
12 station we're at now?

13 A. This is what -- we had four stations that responded. We  
14 have Engine Company 12, Engine Company 19, Engine Company 26, and  
15 a truck company which is called Quint 27, and myself, Battalion 3.  
16 I run out of Station 12 with Engine 12. As well, when we were  
17 notified, that there might be persons trapped, we dispatched a  
18 heavy rescue assignment which initially included 10's heavy rescue  
19 and I believe 1's heavy rescue and 2's medium rescue were  
20 dispatched as well. 1's heavy rescue and 2's medium rescue were  
21 canceled. 10's heavy rescue continued on, and they did arrive on  
22 the scene. We also dispatched fire investigators, a safety  
23 officer, and generally an EMS supervisor is dispatched on any  
24 structure fire.

25 Q. Okay. So who got -- who was there first of the four

1 stations? The truck --

2 A. Okay. Engine 12 and Engine 19 arrived simultaneously  
3 from opposite directions.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. I was in my vehicle behind Engine 12. Engine 19  
6 reported on the scene. Their officer, Captain Juliano reported on  
7 the scene and gave his initial report, established command --

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. -- and they laid a water supply line from a hydrant to  
10 Engine 12, who pulled up at the front of the structure, again  
11 simultaneously. So Engine 12 was the engine company that was  
12 actually pumping water with water supplied from Engine 19's supply  
13 line.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Okay?

16 Q. And you said you were right behind them?

17 A. I was.

18 Q. So you arrived on scene just minutes --

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. -- or seconds after.

21 A. Um-hum.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. And I would say that, according to the narrative, Engine  
24 19 reported laying their supply line at 2:35.

25 Q. And you're looking at -- just for the record, you're



1 looking at the dispatch logs or --

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. -- what are you looking at here? Is that what those are  
4 called?

5 A. These are the dispatch logs from our dispatch center.

6 Q. Okay. And that's -- where are looking -- can you show  
7 me where you see that on there?

8 A. Okay.

9 Q. So I know how to read that.

10 A. Right. What you'll see here is engine 19 laid supply  
11 lines --

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. -- establishing Joppa Court command.

14 Q. Okay. Well, that's -- I think I can handle that. Okay.

15 A. And right before that, that's again Engine 19 is on the  
16 scene. They reported two story apartments well involved, which  
17 means a lot of fire showing from --

18 Q. Oh, okay. They're reporting the riser fire.

19 A. Well, they're -- when we arrived on the scene, actually  
20 the whole front side of the structure was on fire as well as the  
21 gas line.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. The gas line was burning and we had fire involved in the  
24 front set of apartments -- or the front apartment. The rear of  
25 the structure was not yet involved.

1           Q.    Okay.  And just to be sure, we're calling the front of  
2   the structure, the north side on 64th or --

3           A.    Yes.

4           Q.    Okay.

5           A.    Um-hum.  The side facing 65th.  I'm going to have to get  
6   a confirmation on that.

7           Q.    Or was that 64th --

8           CHIEF WHITMER:  I think it actually faced 65th Courtway  
9   South.

10          MR. NICHOLSON:  65th, okay.

11          CHIEF WHITMER:  Captain or Lieutenant, do you --

12          LT. HALE:  The side you're probably referring to is the  
13   side facing Joppa Court actually, which would be the side of the  
14   structure.

15          CHIEF WHITMER:  The front of the structure is here.

16          MR. NICHOLSON:  Can someone just draw it on the  
17   chalkboard?  We've been making people draw things.

18          CHIEF WHITMER:  Sure.  And I'm going to -- again, I may  
19   have to get some --

20          MR. NICHOLSON:  That's fine.  If these two can help us,  
21   as long as we all know what's front.

22          CHIEF WHITMER:  Okay.  This is Georgia Road.  Well, it's  
23   going to be farther back, but --

24          MR. NICHOLSON:  Right.

25          CHIEF WHITMER:  And we had -- this is what I'm calling

1 -- I'm going to call this the A side, B, C and D. This road here  
2 is Joppa.

3 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay.

4 CHIEF WHITMER: And we had a hydrant here. Our engine  
5 company laid a supply line here. We had the other, Engine 12 --

6 BY MR. NICHOLSON:

7 Q. The pumper truck, I guess?

8 A. -- was set up here, and this 19 laid into there. So --

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. And we normally --

11 Q. So the front is on -- what you were calling the front  
12 was the D side?

13 A. No. Well --

14 Q. Oh, A.

15 A. -- I'm going to refer to it -- and the way we normally  
16 designate a building in the fire service is we use divisions.  
17 This is going to be what I would call the Alpha, Bravo, Charlie  
18 and Delta Division.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. And we actually used these early on when we were doing  
21 search and rescue in the back part of the building. Because I did  
22 assign somebody to, I believe, to the Charlie Division Command --

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. -- when we were doing search and rescue.

25 Q. Okay. So how many men are we talking about? When

1   you're on scene, and the two trucks are on scene --

2           A.    Okay.

3           Q.    -- what do we got, 12?

4           A.    That particular day I had four on Engine 12, I had four  
5   on Engine 19, I had three on 26, and I had four on Quint 27, and I  
6   had three on 10's heavy rescue.

7           Q.    Okay.

8           A.    So that's 18 line firefighters.

9           Q.    That's when everyone finally arrived?

10          A.    I'm sorry. I had one more unit. Rescue 12, which is  
11   our ALS transport unit, they had two people.

12          Q.    Okay. So 20 people.

13          A.    And that's not including my support, which would be our  
14   investigator, safety officer --

15          Q.    Okay.

16          A.    -- those folks.

17          Q.    Okay. So as you were saying, you showed up and the  
18   front of the structure, which we're calling the side A side --

19          A.    Alpha side, yes.

20          Q.    -- was on fire, and you had the riser fire going?

21          A.    Yeah. We had -- I would say that approximately this  
22   location was where we had fire coming from the gas line.

23          Q.    Okay.

24          A.    And this whole area, the whole front side had -- where  
25   the collapse was, this was fire all through this section and just

1 heavy smoke back here in the rear.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. But not as much fire in the rear at that time.

4 Q. Okay. And so you were -- I think you were saying Engine  
5 12 was pumping water?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Okay. Just walk me through what happened after that.

8 A. Okay. The anticipation was -- well, it -- they  
9 instructed us pretty early on that we had something different from  
10 just a normal structure fire, and the indication was that it  
11 looked like an explosion because of the amount of brick and  
12 concrete that was scattered on the road and outside the apartment  
13 building, and the fact that a good portion of the front side of  
14 the apartment was missing and we could see into it.

15 So initial concerns after laying -- after establishing  
16 our water supply was to clear the apartment, make sure that we had  
17 gotten everybody out that we could. I initially assigned Engine  
18 26 to do a primary search on the rear side of the structure --

19 Q. Which is C?

20 A. -- which is Charlie, C.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. We could not get into the front apartment because of the  
23 involvement of the fire and concerns with the structural stability  
24 of the building. I had quickly assigned Quint 27, our truck crew  
25 came in, and I instructed their officer to assist Engine 26 in

1 doing the primary search and report back to me when we had  
2 confirmation that we had no victims. And what they did end up  
3 doing was they actually laddered the Delta side of the building.  
4 They threw ladders to the second floor. They could not get into  
5 the apartment from the bottom. The doors were blocked. So they  
6 laddered and went in through a second story window, put personnel  
7 in, did a primary search as quickly as possible, and came out and  
8 instructed that the search of that area was clear, that we did not  
9 have any victims in the back part.

10 Q. Okay. Which is Unit 75? Okay.

11 A. At the time -- kind of simultaneous with this, I had  
12 several lines. We had pulled one inch-and-three-quarter handline  
13 off and two 3-inch, what we would call handlines.

14 Q. These are hoses?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. And we had a -- coming off of Engine 12, we had one  
18 3-inch line here, we had one 3-inch line here, and we had an inch-  
19 and-three-quarter line, which is a smaller handline, that was  
20 supporting the primary search on the Delta side.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. Also we had on our engines, large nozzles. We call them  
23 monitor guns. And I had instructed Engine 12 to get ready to set  
24 up their monitor gun. Monitor guns are capable of flowing  
25 anywhere from 750 to 1250, 1500 gallons of water a minute, a

1 deluge gun if you want to call it that, and it stays mounted on  
2 the engine. I instructed them to get ready to set that up as soon  
3 as we finished searching the rear part of the structure. What we  
4 wanted to avoid doing is pushing fire back here --

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. -- until we have this completely searched.

7 I had considered bringing the ladder truck in and  
8 setting the ladder truck up if we did have difficulty putting the  
9 fire out, but as it turns out, with the monitor gun flowing and  
10 the 3-inch lines, we actually extinguished the fire rather  
11 quickly. Except for the gas line. We kept the gas line burning.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. At the same time that this was going on, I started  
14 getting reports of injuries from police. When we pulled up on the  
15 scene, we did not have any victims visible in the street or in the  
16 area.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. But police started coming to my command post, and I did  
19 establish -- my command post was back here on this side. They  
20 said that they had victims in certain apartments. I think that  
21 the neighboring apartments, people had gone and gotten people out  
22 or pulled people off the street and taken them into the  
23 apartments, and some of them were in police cruisers from what I  
24 was being told.

25 Q. Okay.

1           A.    So I detached my rescue unit, Rescue 12, to go assist  
2 with one possible victim and then I called for two additional  
3 rescue units. And when I say a rescue unit, it's an ambulance.

4           Q.    Oh, okay.

5           A.    It's a transport unit.

6           Q.    Okay.

7           A.    That's just our term for ambulance. And I ended up  
8 getting a rescue -- I want to say Rescue 19 and Rescue 22 and I  
9 believe Rescue 8 eventually showed up.

10          Q.    So three ambulances were on --

11          A.    Well, we got three plus the one that was already on the  
12 scene. Those were the ones that we kind of used continuously  
13 through the whole incident. And it wasn't -- what we didn't  
14 experience was a lot of victims at one time. We just kept getting  
15 information that we had more people injured and more people  
16 injured. So as they were transporting to the hospitals and going  
17 in service, they were coming back to us and we just continually --

18          Q.    Oh, I see.

19          A.    -- transported.

20          Q.    Okay, you would transport a few and then they'd return.

21          A.    Yeah, if I had had multiple victims at one time, I would  
22 have called for as many rescue units -- we have 15 transport units  
23 in the city. I could have had access to as many as I needed that  
24 were available.

25          Q.    Sure.



1           A.    But as the information came to me, that's how I called  
2   for the units.

3           Q.    So at this time the wounded you're seeing are walking  
4   wounded --

5           A.    Yes.

6           Q.    -- and were able to help themselves?

7           A.    Right.  And I personally don't -- I didn't witness any  
8   of the victims, but I kept hearing that some of them had, you  
9   know, crawled through the windows or came out of windows of the  
10  apartment where the explosion was.  But they all seemed to be  
11  minor injuries, nothing life threatening, nothing -- I believe  
12  they were all ambulatory actually.

13          Q.    What's that?

14          A.    They were ambulatory.  They were able to walk and move  
15  around on their own.  Some of my rescue officers reported that  
16  they did seem to be sort of in a state of shock from what had  
17  happened.  So --

18          Q.    But -- so the people that were walking wounded, they  
19  were treated on scene and released or did they --

20          A.    No, no.

21          Q.    -- they were ambulated?

22          A.    I mean, we always do an assessment on the scene.

23          Q.    Okay.

24          A.    But almost initially, within the first 15 or 20 minutes,  
25  I think we transported out three people and then we came back

1 later, and I want to say we ended up transporting a total of  
2 eight. So initially -- I believe what happened was initially some  
3 of the people from the apartment were assessed. They didn't --  
4 they either refused transport or didn't want to go to the  
5 hospital, and then they came back later and decided, yes, we need  
6 to go to the hospital.

7 Q. Okay. So the total persons transported was eight?

8 A. Um-hum. That's correct.

9 Q. Okay. And --

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Does that include the gentleman  
11 pulled out?

12 CHIEF WHITMER: Yes.

13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay. He was included.

14 CHIEF WHITMER: Um-hum.

15 BY MR. NICHOLSON:

16 Q. Did you -- this person that was pulled out, can you talk  
17 a little bit about where he was located and --

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. -- extraction required?

20 A. Sure. Let me -- in the meantime, I called for Public  
21 Works.

22 Q. Um-hum. Oh, okay.

23 A. With the collapse of the second floor, and the whole  
24 time we were working, especially Lt. Hale, we were trying to get  
25 an assessment of how many people were in the apartment, how many

1 were missing, and how many were accounted for, and this was  
2 ongoing through the whole incident. It was confusing for us.

3 Q. Sure.

4 A. We were getting names and contacts of people that we  
5 were transporting, sending people to the hospital to talk to them,  
6 trying to find out who we had not accounted for and how many were  
7 in there.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. There -- we had heard for the longest time that there  
10 was an infant in there that was not accounted for, and we were  
11 working on the basis that we knew we had possibly two adults and  
12 an infant. Almost to the end of the incident, we thought we had  
13 two adults and one infant.

14 Q. Unaccounted for?

15 A. Unaccounted for.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. Towards the end, police were actually able to determine  
18 that the infant had been removed from the apartment earlier in the  
19 day and they had actually put eyes on the infant, so we knew we  
20 didn't have an infant. But the -- we were even maybe 3 hours into  
21 the incident, we were told the adult male and adult female that  
22 were not accounted for, they were at the hospital. And so we  
23 thought for maybe 30 minutes we did not have any victims at all,  
24 but then word came back, no, they aren't at the hospital, they  
25 were never transported. And I would say maybe around 6:00, 6:30

1 in the morning, we finally had a firm determination that we did  
2 have two adults that were unaccounted for that were most likely  
3 still in the apartment building.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. So I would say of all the things that we were dealing  
6 with, that was one of the biggest struggles was determining who  
7 was not accounted for.

8 We also were dealing with the gas line. Once we had  
9 extinguished just the ordinary combustibles of the apartment  
10 building, we had the gas line that was still leaking and still  
11 burning. And I had called for Alagasco -- it says here that I  
12 called for them at 2:43. Let's see. And I would say that -- I'm  
13 not exactly sure when Alagasco got on the scene. I was still  
14 calling for them at 3:07, I believe, because I reported that we  
15 had a major gas leak that was on fire. At 3:08, our dispatcher  
16 informed me that ETA for Alagasco was 10 minutes, and I believe  
17 that they got on the scene shortly after that. Yeah, at 3 -- I  
18 got a report of 3:27 of Alagasco on the scene. Now --

19 Q. Can you say that again? I'm sorry. 3 --

20 A. 3:27.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. Yeah. Now there might be some delay there because that  
23 means I actually have to lay eyes on them --

24 Q. Sure.

25 A. -- and then if I'm doing something else, it may take me

1 a few minutes to report that they're on the scene. Because at  
2 this point our concern was trying to get the gas shut off so we  
3 could extinguish that gas fire. Again, we weren't going to put  
4 that out until -- we let that burn in order to keep gas just from  
5 leaking into there. It's better for it to burn.

6 Q. But the structure fire's out at this point?

7 A. The structure fire, yes.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. It was under control. And then there -- I think  
10 Alagasco got on the scene and there was discussion about what's  
11 the best way for them to get that gas line shut off. I know they  
12 were discussing, and maybe I shouldn't discuss that because I  
13 don't know exactly what they were talking. What they told me was  
14 they were thinking about either putting a cap on it right there  
15 where the fire was, the pipe that was broken, or they were also  
16 trying to dig underground and maybe find a break in the line  
17 somewhere away from the building and cap it there.

18 Q. Who were you dealing with at Alagasco?

19 A. I don't have a name.

20 Q. Do you remember?

21 A. No.

22 Q. Okay. Did he identify himself as being incident  
23 commander or was it a technician, do you think, or --

24 A. Well, they -- I know they had several supervisors --

25 Q. Okay.

1           A.    -- and then they had workers.  When they arrived on the  
2 scene, they had a lot of people there.

3           Q.    Okay.

4           A.    It did not take them long to get their backhoe in  
5 operation and start working and digging to try to determine --

6           Q.    Were you interfacing with just one of those individuals?

7           A.    Initially I told them what we needed, that we needed the  
8 gas shut off --

9           Q.    Okay.

10          A.    -- so we could put the fire out, and at that point I  
11 think they went about their business doing what they needed to do  
12 to get it shut off.

13          Q.    And why did you need that fire out?  You said the  
14 structure fire was out.  So you could start doing your work,  
15 right?

16          A.    Yeah.

17          Q.    Or was this gas fire preventing you from going in?

18          A.    Well, it was -- it prevented us -- we couldn't get in on  
19 the right-hand side just because of the heat coming from that  
20 fire.

21          Q.    Oh, on the D side?

22          A.    Yes, on the D side.

23          Q.    Okay.

24          A.    Now we did do some work on the B side, on the Bravo  
25 side.  We started pulling debris off of the slab, trying to see if

1 we could -- we were trying to determine, you know, find any  
2 victims up underneath the slab. The problem with this was, again,  
3 we didn't feel like it was a stable environment underneath the  
4 slab because of the way it collapsed. We weren't going to put  
5 anybody underneath that slab unless, you know, unless we had  
6 evidence that there was a live person in there. At that point we  
7 did not have any evidence that there was anybody alive in the  
8 structure.

9 Q. Yeah, that's what I wanted to ask. So you could never  
10 see anything --

11 A. No.

12 Q. -- showing you --

13 A. And we had -- because of the way the sides of the  
14 apartment blew out, we had access from either side. You could  
15 actually look through the bottom floor of the apartment and see  
16 almost all the way through.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. There was a concrete slab second floor that collapsed,  
19 probably a 16-inch slab, and it did not come down flat. It came  
20 down at an angle.

21 Q. Right.

22 A. And so there was a void space underneath there, and  
23 that's where we were trying to identify if victims was in that  
24 void space --

25 Q. Okay.

1           A.    -- if there was anybody there.

2           Q.    And you -- no one was there or you just couldn't see  
3 them? Because you did find two victims, right?

4           A.    Obviously there was somebody there.

5           Q.    But were they in that void space or were they --

6           A.    They were in the void space right on the edge of the  
7 Alpha-Bravo corner.

8           Q.    Oh, okay. So they were towards this end?

9           A.    Yes.

10          Q.    Okay.

11          A.    And, I mean, if you want to move on to that part of  
12 it --

13          Q.    No.

14          A.    -- I mean, I can --

15          Q.    No, we don't have to go there now. We'll come back to  
16 it.

17          A.    Okay. But I would say within an hour maybe, an hour and  
18 a half, Alagasco came back to me and said -- well, first we were  
19 told that they wanted us to put the fire out on the pipe that was  
20 leaking. So we took two handlines to that side, a 3-inch handline  
21 and an inch-and-three-quarter handline, because we were told they  
22 were going to put the fire out and then go in and cap it or use an  
23 expanding fitting. I'm not sure which -- what they were going to  
24 do. So we did that. We put the fire out and then there was, I  
25 guess -- I don't know if they decided that they were going to try



1 to do -- shut the gas off another way. They were still digging  
2 away from the apartment building.

3 Q. On the D side?

4 A. On the D side, yes.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. So we did keep a line there of flowing water just to  
7 help disperse the gas, which was not burning anymore.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. And it probably -- again I'm guessing because I was  
10 doing a lot of other things at the time --

11 Q. Sure.

12 A. -- but I would say maybe, you know, for maybe 15 or 20  
13 minutes, we did that until they did get the gas shut off.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. So there was probably a 15 or 20-minute period when gas  
16 was flowing but was not burning.

17 Q. Right. And what did you do? You just blow it with  
18 water and --

19 A. Um-hum.

20 Q. -- kind of push it or disperse it somehow; is that --

21 A. Right.

22 Q. Okay. That's not the monitor gun? You're not deluging  
23 your --

24 A. No, we had -- by this time, we had shut the monitor gun  
25 down because we had most of the fire extinguished. We didn't need

1 to be putting that much water into the structure.

2 Q. Okay. So they were successful in shutting off the gas  
3 once it was extinguished?

4 A. Yes, that's correct.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. And also, other utilities, Alabama Power was on the  
7 scene and they -- the Alabama Power representative reported to me  
8 initially that he had cut power to the involved apartment as well  
9 as all of the apartment buildings around, and then he was able to  
10 come back and reconnect all of those apartment buildings and he  
11 was able to leave just the involved apartment shut off as far as  
12 power.

13 Q. Okay. Do you know about what time we're at when this  
14 gas went out? Is that anything you would have called back?

15 A. I'm looking through my report. I don't recall what  
16 time, what time the gas was shut off.

17 Q. Was it daylight? Do you remember that?

18 A. No, no, it was before daylight.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Yeah. If I had to guess, I would say probably around  
21 5:00.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. It could have been as early as 4:30. I was looking to  
24 see if I could give you a time of when we reported the fire under  
25 control. I don't see it in this report. But other things that we

1 were doing that sort of involved the same time, you know, we were  
2 talking to Public Works. My thinking there was with the explosion  
3 and the possibility of victims, we were going to need some heavy  
4 equipment to help lift the slab to get up underneath it. So I was  
5 working with Mr. Lupo and the Public Works representatives to get  
6 a trackhoe out there to help us with that.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. We also -- it's pretty standard when we have families  
9 displaced, we call for Red Cross, which we call ARCHIE. If you  
10 see a report of ARCHIE in here --

11 Q. Oh, okay. Thank you. Yes.

12 A. Yeah, that's Red Cross. And they will come out and  
13 supply clothing and food and housing if needed to people that are  
14 displaced.

15 I was also notified by the police -- I was not aware at  
16 the time, but they had evacuated a good number of people to a  
17 recreation center in the area that were from the surrounding  
18 apartments. So we --

19 Q. Who made that decision to evacuate to the rec center?  
20 Was that you?

21 A. I did not make that decision. I think the police did  
22 that. I did ask Red Cross to respond to that location. That's  
23 where I had them respond to.

24 Q. So did this become a unified command at some point since  
25 we had so many other agencies?

1 A. Yes, yes.

2 Q. It did?

3 A. Um-hum.

4 Q. Okay. And so under that unified command, was Alagasco  
5 pulled in as well?

6 A. Um-hum.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. But you don't know who the individual was?

10 A. No, and I would say I had -- my command post was the  
11 back of my vehicle. I had a status board set up and everything  
12 there. So they were coming and reporting to me. Police were  
13 coming and reporting to me as well. I didn't really have -- other  
14 than the officers that were assisting me from the fire department,  
15 people were kind of in and out the whole time.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. Public Works was in and out. Alagasco was in and out.

18 Q. Okay. It was one individual from Alagasco? I mean, it  
19 sounds like it's kind of a loosely formed uniformed command.

20 A. I really can't speak to that.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. I mean, I identified one person who was a supervisor --

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. -- but I was kind of prompting them to tell me what was  
25 going on and what the status was --

1 Q. Sure.

2 A. -- how long it was going to take to have the fire put  
3 out. So --

4 Q. Okay. And were they responsive?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Oh, they were?

7 A. Oh, yes, absolutely.

8 Q. Okay. Did they get -- was this riser fire put out in a  
9 timely fashion or did it impede other efforts?

10 A. It didn't -- I don't -- it did not impede anything. It  
11 was -- I really can't speak to whether or not it was timely in  
12 that I don't know what they were having to deal with.

13 Q. Sure.

14 A. And I don't know their SOPs for dealing with something  
15 like this. You know, I --

16 Q. I guess timely, I meant for you. Did it work for your  
17 operation?

18 A. Well, I was told that, you know, initially they were  
19 digging away from the apartment building trying to find the  
20 underground line going in --

21 Q. Right.

22 A. -- and I know they told me they had difficulty finding  
23 where the line came out of the building underground.

24 Q. Right.

25 A. And they were having to dig several holes trying to

1     locate that.

2           Q.     Um-hum.

3           A.     That was fairly early on, though.

4           Q.     Okay.

5           A.     But, no, there was -- I would say that there was a very  
6     good spirit of cooperation between everybody.

7           Q.     Good. Well, we had talked to someone yesterday that had  
8     indicated that maybe there was a sense of frustration or that they  
9     were feeling pressure by the fire department to get that riser  
10    fire out quickly so that fire operations could continue elsewhere.  
11    That's why I'm asking that question. I just wasn't sure.

12          A.     Okay. And if they felt that way, it wasn't intentional  
13    on my part --

14          Q.     Sure. No.

15          A.     -- to put pressure on them.

16          Q.     I just want to be sure that --

17          A.     It might have just been me asking, you know, what are we  
18    doing and when is this -- when are we going have this fire out?

19          Q.     Well, there were no names given, but --

20          A.     Yeah.

21          Q.     -- I just want to be sure that, you know, this wasn't  
22    preventing some other effort you were trying to do maybe on the  
23    Bravo side or the Alpha side.

24          A.     Right.

25          Q.     Okay. So, I'm sorry, we got sidetracked here. You

1 called public works to get a trackhoe in to remove the slab?

2 A. Yes. One other thing --

3 Q. Sure.

4 A. -- as we're going through, I kind of recall different  
5 things. I did request our public information officer -- that was  
6 one of my -- when I realized what we had and we were possibly  
7 going to have victims, anytime we have a large incident, a second  
8 alarm fire or unusual incident, we normally call for our -- we  
9 call them a PIO, public information -- you'll see PIO in the --

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. -- reading. That stands for public information officer.  
12 And maybe as a response to that or as a response to one of my  
13 communications was that we had a possible explosion, the fire  
14 chief responded to the incident as well.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. And our EMS battalion chief responded. They -- like I  
17 said, they arrived on the scene within an hour of the incident  
18 being started.

19 Q. Oh, okay. So we're backing up a little bit.

20 A. Yeah, that's why I was trying to --

21 Q. And that's perfectly all right. Who's the fire chief?  
22 What's his --

23 A. Ivor Brooks, B-r-o-o-k-s.

24 Q. Okay. And you mentioned, was it the deputy chief as  
25 well?

1           A.    Well, we had a battalion chief, our EMS battalion chief.  
2           Q.    Okay.  
3           A.    Do you need his name?  
4           Q.    Sure, if would.  
5           A.    Okay.  Ross, R-o-s-s, Sheffield.  
6           Q.    Okay.  
7           A.    And I believe when the fire chief arrived on the scene,  
8 he requested -- this was his communication.  He requested his E  
9 staff to respond, and that was at -- I'm reading on here.  That  
10 was at 4:02.  
11          Q.    Requested his E staff?  
12          A.    Yeah.  
13          Q.    Emergency or --  
14          A.    No, well --  
15          Q.    -- what is that?  
16          A.    Just his --  
17                UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:  Executive staff.  
18                CHIEF WHITMER:  Yeah.  
19                BY MR. NICHOLSON:  
20          Q.    Oh, I'm sorry.  Okay.  
21          A.    His assistants.  His assistant chiefs.  
22          Q.    His entourage.  
23          A.    Yeah.  
24          Q.    Okay.  
25          A.    And I know that at some point the mayor, Mayor Bell,



1 arrived on the scene as well.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. Along with Mr. Lupo and some representatives from the  
4 city.

5 Q. Sure.

6 A. As far as finding the victims, do you want to move on to  
7 that or do you want to --

8 Q. Wherever we are chronologically.

9 A. Okay.

10 Q. I'm not quite clear. You said you called for the city,  
11 Public Works to help you move that concrete slab.

12 A. Um-hum.

13 Q. We also heard that Alagasco people were involved with  
14 their heavy equipment too.

15 A. They were.

16 Q. Okay. So --

17 A. Yeah. And that's what I was just looking at. I was  
18 trying to see, trying to get an idea of what time we realized that  
19 we had a live patient.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. And I was looking through the dispatch report to see  
22 when I called for the heavy rescues, and I'm not -- I don't see it  
23 in here. But I can kind of go through it, just what happened.

24 Q. So heavy Rescue 3 isn't on -- was it heavy Rescue 3?

25 A. Okay. What -- I would say that about daylight, which is

1 going to be around 6:00 in the morning --

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. -- I started putting companies back in service. My  
4 decision was to leave two engine companies on the scene because we  
5 change shifts at 8:00 in the morning.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. So I had put 10's heavy rescue in service before 6:00,  
8 Engine 26 and Quint 27 had all gone in service to return to their  
9 quarters. I left Engine 12 and Engine 19 on the scene and myself  
10 and I believe Rescue 12 was still available.

11 At this point we had determined just through our  
12 communications with the hospitals and our rescue units that we did  
13 indeed have two adults that were not accounted for. We considered  
14 this -- or I considered this a body recovery at that time, that we  
15 were not going to have any live --

16 Q. Oh, okay.

17 A. -- victims, patients, because of the -- given the  
18 conditions of the structure and the intensity of the fire, all  
19 those things were taken into account, the collapse itself, that  
20 conditions were not good for survival.

21 Q. Sure.

22 A. So the police, the police department sergeant, again  
23 around daylight, around 6:00, came to me and he said -- he asked  
24 if it would be okay if we held off on using a trackhoe until he  
25 could get his investigators there to take pictures of the scene,

1 and I said that would not be a problem. And I'm not sure if they  
2 -- what department they were coming from, probably evidence  
3 technicians is what they were discussing. So we decided to give  
4 them time to get the evidence technicians there to take their  
5 pictures and we were going to hold Public Works off with the  
6 trackhoe until they got their pictures.

7           And by this time, the sun was coming up. We had better  
8 visibility and I decided to go down to the B side of the structure  
9 and look underneath the slab just to see if we could determine  
10 where Public Works were going to start to -- need to start working  
11 and start trying to get that slab raised up so that we could find  
12 the victims. Again, we had an open void that we could see  
13 through. I got down and was kind of looking underneath the slab,  
14 looking back. Maybe 10 feet down the Bravo side, I was looking  
15 back towards the A side in the corner, and I had my flashlight,  
16 and I saw something move in that front corner, and at first I  
17 wasn't sure what it was. I really did not expect for anybody to  
18 be alive in there.

19           So I yelled and I got a response from the male that was  
20 trapped. So at that time I came out and I told the crews that  
21 were still on the scene, we have somebody trapped that's still  
22 alive, and I requested back our 10's heavy rescue and 1's heavy  
23 rescue because they have the equipment that we would possibly need  
24 to raise that slab up and get that person out.

25           I also -- at this time Alagasco was working on the Delta

1 side. They had two -- I want to say they had two backhoes on the  
2 scene, at least two backhoes, maybe more than that. I walked over  
3 and requested that they bring their equipment over and start  
4 clearing the debris away from the building on that side so we'd  
5 have a place to work, and we noticed that the male patient, he was  
6 moving actually his foot, from the ankle down was sticking out  
7 from between the slab and a mattress that was there, and he was  
8 moving -- we could see movement.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. And he was responding to us.

11 MR. CHHATRE: Can you -- will you put an "X" there where  
12 the victims were?

13 CHIEF WHITMER: Yes. They were laying approximately  
14 right there and there, and it appeared that they were on a  
15 mattress and part of the mattress was sticking out from the slab  
16 right there --

17 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay.

18 CHIEF WHITMER: -- that we could see. So again Alagasco  
19 assisted us. We had a lot of debris, a lot of bricks right in  
20 this area. They helped. They brought their backhoes over and  
21 cleared an area where we could get in to work easier. The slab  
22 was all the way -- the second floor slab was all the way to the  
23 ground on the bottom floor.

24 BY MR. NICHOLSON:

25 Q. Was it pinning these individuals?

1           A.    Yes.

2           Q.    It was.   Okay.   Okay.

3           A.    It angled.   From here back, it angled up maybe at a  
4   30-degree angle, all the way up to this point where it was still  
5   attached.

6           Q.    Um-hum.

7           A.    So once we -- we were working here trying to get this  
8   cleared up while our heavy rescues were responding back to the  
9   scene.   We had -- one of our paramedics on our rescue unit was  
10   talking to the person that was responding to us.   We were trying  
11   to determine the best way to get him out from underneath that  
12   slab.   There was not a lot of room to move.

13                   At this point I saw Battalion Chief Matt Russell.   He  
14   was on the scene.   He is our training battalion chief.   And his  
15   background and his experience is in heavy rescue.   He teaches  
16   classes at our state fire college and he's more knowledgeable in  
17   heavy rescue operations than I am, and he was sort of telling me  
18   what he thought needed to be done:   we need to do this, bring this  
19   in and that.   And so rather than muddy the waters, I appointed him  
20   as --

21           Q.    Okay.

22           A.    -- operations, our rescue operations chief.   He took  
23   over the rescue operations and I stayed in as incident commander.

24           Q.    Okay.

25           A.    Stayed in the role of incident commander.

1           By this time, we had -- all of the spot fires were out.  
2   We -- you know, the gas was shut off. There was really nothing --  
3   it was maybe a little bit of smoldering but all the fires were out  
4   at this time.

5           And I don't know if you want to go into detail on the  
6   rescue operation or not, or if that's --

7       Q.   Yeah, a little bit. I'm curious to know. I've seen  
8   some pictures. It looks like maybe an air pack was used. Or just  
9   how they got that structure up, what difficulties they had.

10      A.   Well, the -- we had concerns with the stability of the  
11   slab and then our lifting capabilities. I've heard somebody  
12   estimate how much that slab weighed. I'm not exactly sure myself,  
13   but our initial thought was -- I mean, when this was going to be a  
14   body recovery, we were going to use the trackhoe to help us lift  
15   the slab up.

16      Q.   Okay.

17      A.   But once we realized we had a live person, we didn't  
18   want to go that route. So Chief Russell, we determined that we  
19   were going to try to lift the slab with the tools that we had. So  
20   we used two different pieces of equipment. We have airbags,  
21   industrial airbags that are normally used for raising vehicles or  
22   things like this, slabs.

23      Q.   This is equipment on the heavy rescue truck?

24      A.   On the heavy rescue, yes.

25      Q.   So they were on site?

1           A.    Yes, by this time they had arrived on the scene.  I  
2    would say that from the time I requested till I got them on the  
3    scene was maybe probably 10 minutes for the first arriving  
4    company.  Their station is not too far from this location.

5                   And we were doing other things waiting for them to  
6    arrive with all their equipment.  We were using the backhoes of  
7    Alagasco to dig a trench around it, trying to again have access to  
8    the mattress that he was laying on, seeing if we could maybe lower  
9    him rather than raise the slab.  We were trying some different  
10   options.

11           Q.    Oh, I see.

12           A.    Just to try to think of some different options.

13           Q.    Dig him out.  You were trying to dig under the  
14   mattress --

15           A.    Right, yeah.

16           Q.    -- so you could maybe slide him out.

17           A.    Exactly.

18           Q.    Okay.

19           A.    But just -- he was -- it was so tight, we saw that we  
20   weren't going to be able to do that.  So when we got all of our  
21   equipment on the scene, we have -- we call it an AMKUS tool.  Most  
22   people would refer to it as jaws, jaws of life.

23           Q.    Okay.

24           A.    We had two jaws that we inserted.  We had one here, and  
25   then we had one over here, and then we were supplementing with

1     airbags here, here, here, and then the mattress was right here.  
2     So -- and then we were cribbing, which is just building a  
3     foundation in case something does fail. If the slab comes back  
4     down, it stops on the cribbing. It's like using a floor jack when  
5     you're working on an automobile. So we were cribbing there and  
6     there. We had cribbing building up a tower, which is --

7           Q.     Are those the like 4x4 --

8           A.     Yeah, the yellow --

9           UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:   The yellow blocks.

10          CHIEF WHITMER:   -- yellow blocks that you saw.

11          BY MR. NICHOLSON:

12          Q.     Okay.

13          A.     Which that's pretty standard in any kind of heavy rescue  
14     operation. You always have something, a failsafe in case it does  
15     fail.

16                 So using the combination, the jaws and the airbags, they  
17     were able to raise the slab up I would say a good maybe 15 inches,  
18     enough to where we were able to get the person that was alive out.  
19     The female was trapped further in, and it was going to be more  
20     difficult to get her out, but we didn't get any response from her,  
21     never did get any response from her. In the position that she was  
22     in, it appeared that she was not alive. And again, there was just  
23     no -- there was no room to put anybody in there and just  
24     structurally it wasn't sound enough to put anybody underneath that  
25     slab.



1           Q.   How much clearance do we have?  What are we talking  
2   total from the slab, the floor slab to where you had lifted it, to  
3   the bottom of the --

4           A.   I would say we probably ended up, we probably ended up  
5   coming up 15 inches.

6           Q.   Oh, so your total clearance was just 15 inches --

7           A.   Yeah.

8           Q.   -- at that point?

9           A.   Yeah.

10          Q.   Oh, okay.

11          A.   And we were -- we didn't want to raise it too much more  
12   because we were concerned with the slab itself breaking and coming  
13   back down.  We were trying to do just as little as possible to get  
14   them out.  He was removed, put on a backboard and transported to  
15   our Level 1 trauma center here in the city.

16          Q.   Okay.

17          A.   And he was -- I would say he was alert.  He was -- I  
18   would not say he was oriented, but he was alert and communicating.

19          Q.   And his injuries were burns and --

20          A.   I can't speak to that.

21          Q.   Okay.

22          A.   Just from what I observed, he did have some burns but I  
23   would not know any more details.  And probably --

24          Q.   Who took him away?  Which of your rescues?  Do you know?

25          A.   Rescue, I believe Rescue 22 had come back on -- had

1 arrived back on the scene and transported, but I don't know for  
2 sure.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. And then shortly after that, we were able to -- we did  
5 have to raise the slab a little bit higher to get the female out,  
6 and from what I was told -- I was standing back and letting  
7 operations handle it. She was in a position, it appeared that she  
8 had been crushed, and so we removed her from the structure and she  
9 was put on a backboard and covered with blankets and left on the  
10 scene, not transported.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. And then by this time, we were -- this was approximately  
13 8:00 in the morning. We had crews that were being relieved on the  
14 scene. Shifts were ending. With something like this, you know,  
15 we work -- we do what we have to do. We'll work as long as we  
16 need to work but we were relieving crews on the scene.

17 Q. Sure.

18 A. And I was actually relieved myself by Battalion Chief  
19 Don Jones.

20 Q. Okay. At 8 a.m.?

21 A. Probably closer to 8:30, 9:00, something like that.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. Yeah, yeah.

24 Q. I'm sorry. Who was that? Captain --

25 A. No, it's chief.

1 Q. I'm sorry, chief.

2 A. Battalion Chief Don Jones.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. So anything that happened past that, after that point,  
5 I'm, you know --

6 Q. Okay. When you got the two victims out, you were fairly  
7 certain at that point you didn't have anyone else?

8 A. Yes, yes.

9 Q. And when you had the 15 inches, I suppose you could have  
10 -- you had full view of the downstairs?

11 A. No, because of the way we lifted the slab -- my  
12 impression was that we were actually raising and rotating off of  
13 this corner.

14 Q. Okay. Yeah, so that corner dipped over there.

15 A. Um-hum.

16 Q. Yeah, okay.

17 A. And there was so much debris. When I said we had a  
18 clear shot that we could see all the way through, I mean you might  
19 see daylight here and there breaking through just from the other  
20 side, but there was a lot of debris --

21 Q. Sure.

22 A. -- all trapped under there. You had furniture and the  
23 kitchen and everything else up underneath that slab where it had  
24 come down, and then everything on the second floor was basically  
25 still resting on top of the slab.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. The whole front of the apartment building is exposed  
3 because of the explosion so that as you were looking at the  
4 building, you were looking at the top, but the top part of the  
5 building you're looking at is actually that second floor slab --

6 Q. Right.

7 A. -- where it came down, angled down. And we had been  
8 told that anybody -- the people that were on the second floor had  
9 gotten out. We knew that. It was just some of the people that  
10 were on the bottom floor had not gotten out.

11 Q. You knew that the people on the top floor were out --

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. -- because they had been taken to the hospital?

14 A. Right, and we had --

15 Q. How many persons were there on the top floor?

16 CHIEF WHITMER: Lt. Hale, do you remember how many came  
17 out of that apartment?

18 LT. HALE: In total, out of that particular apartment  
19 five people.

20 CHIEF WHITMER: Okay.

21 MR. CHHATRE: From the front apartment or the back?

22 LT. HALE: The front apartment, on the Alpha side.

23 MR. NICHOLSON: The collapsed part.

24 BY MR. NICHOLSON:

25 Q. Five total including our one deceased and one --

1 A. Right.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. That's kind of it.

4 Q. That's pretty good. That was a good story. That was  
5 very complete actually. So I thank you.

6 MR. NICHOLSON: I'll let Ravi do any follow-up  
7 questions.

8 MR. CHHATRE: Yeah.

9 BY MR. CHHATRE:

10 Q. You had mentioned something about the alarm. Let me  
11 just back up. I've got so many notes here. You said you  
12 established the incident command on the corner of Alpha and Bravo?

13 A. Yes, sir.

14 Q. And you were the incident commander throughout --

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. -- the shift until you were relieved.

17 A. Until the next morning, yes, sir.

18 Q. And do you recall how many different people you talked  
19 to on the Alagasco side? You may not know their names but --

20 A. Yeah. I spoke with I would say three or four  
21 individuals.

22 Q. Okay. Did anybody from Alagasco side came and told you  
23 that they are going to be the coordinator, incident commander from  
24 Alagasco side? I mean, that will be the person to go to so that  
25 you don't have to chase different people.

1           A.    I don't recall anybody, you know --

2           Q.    Doing that.  Okay.

3           A.    -- specifically say -- having somebody designated.  I  
4 know that there was one or two individuals that I identified that  
5 were in charge immediately that were there, and those were the  
6 individuals that I kind of referred to --

7           Q.    A couple or two or three people?

8           A.    -- at the incident.

9           Q.    Okay.

10          A.    Yes.

11          Q.    Now when you arrived, were the police already on the  
12 scene?

13          A.    Yes.

14          Q.    Do you know what time the police might have arrived?  We  
15 can check with them but if you --

16          A.    I don't have, I don't have that information.  I don't  
17 know if they were already patrolling the area and heard the  
18 explosion.  I would say that the officer in our East Lake Station,  
19 Station 19, he heard the explosion from the fire station.

20          Q.    Okay.

21          A.    Because he made the comment to me, it woke him up.  He  
22 went to use the restroom because he knew he was getting ready to  
23 go on a call.

24          Q.    Oh, okay.

25          A.    And he said he didn't know if it was wreck or something

1 else.

2 Q. Sure.

3 A. But he heard it. And so I'm -- that area is fairly well  
4 patrolled by the police, so I'm assuming that they were probably  
5 right in the area.

6 Q. When it happened?

7 A. When it happened, yes.

8 Q. Yeah, makes sense.

9 A. And they were already identifying patients, and they  
10 handled all of the -- they cordoned off the area for us. They  
11 always help us with protecting our hydrants, our water supply.  
12 And then they also handled the evacuation of the surrounding  
13 apartments.

14 Q. Okay, so evacuation is their call?

15 A. Well, and we make that call together, especially like  
16 with a hazmat incident. If we deem that we need a certain area  
17 evacuated, and it's safe for the police to work and operate, then  
18 we'll use them because they can bring in personnel and do that.

19 Q. Um-hum. So going back to the time, if I heard you  
20 correctly, 2:31 is when the 911 call came in, a 911 call, you  
21 were --

22 A. Well, I'm going by what's on my report of dispatch, and  
23 the first narrative is at 2:31 and it's a weather report.

24 Q. Um-hum.

25 A. At 2:32 there's a narrative that Alabama Power has been

1 notified, and then at 2:34 our first engine company arrived on the  
2 scene and reported that there was an apartment building well  
3 involved in fire.

4 Q. So but there's no narrative as to who called your, I  
5 guess -- I don't know what you call it, maybe who calls your  
6 office here or fire department?

7 A. As far as how do we -- how do I receive it?

8 Q. How do you know that there had been an explosion or you  
9 had to go to that particular location?

10 A. Okay. And unfortunately while we've been sitting here,  
11 there hasn't been a tone out because you would know it very, very  
12 -- you'd know what you were listening to. We just -- we have a  
13 tone that goes off in the station and the dispatchers, they'll  
14 tell us what the dispatch is, who's being assigned to the dispatch  
15 and what the incident is. You'll hear a loud tone. It's a do,  
16 do, do, do, do, that goes off all through the station.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. So then your dispatcher will dispatch you guys?

20 A. Right. That's correct.

21 Q. But from your narrative here, and I'm not familiar with  
22 this printout here, but so do you get called directly from  
23 somebody or 911 calls you or, I mean, typically how --

24 A. Well, it depends -- from the way I understand is if --  
25 it depends on how the call comes in. It's either a direct dial to



1 our emergency number or if somebody dials 911, then it has to go  
2 through a 911 operator and they transfer the call to our fire  
3 dispatchers.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Sometimes the police will get the call and they have to  
6 transfer the call to our fire. Our fire and police are separate.  
7 They're not dispatching --

8 Q. Right.

9 A. -- out of the same center.

10 Q. Okay. Is it possible to chase this down to find out  
11 whether the call came to you guys or the call came to 911?

12 A. I'm sure that our dispatchers can do that.

13 Q. If you can just do that so that we'll know?

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. The whole purpose is really --

16 A. From what I understand, there was multiple calls at the  
17 same time.

18 Q. Right. No, I understand.

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. But what we are really trying to do is find out kind of  
21 going back to what time actually likely the explosion occurred.  
22 And but it looks like, if 2:32 is when you guys were notified, so  
23 something happened, at least on your dispatch side before 2:32.

24 A. Right.

25 Q. And so, I mean, now I feel a little bit closer to

1 probably the explosion happened anywhere before 2:32.

2 A. I think we can find that out for you.

3 Q. And that will help.

4 A. Okay.

5 Q. So --

6 MR. NICHOLSON: Well, you said Station -- someone at  
7 Station 19 actually heard it, right? So --

8 CHIEF WHITMER: Yes.

9 MR. NICHOLSON: Maybe that's someone that could help us,  
10 talk to it.

11 MR. CHHATRE: Yeah, if we can figure that out, yeah.

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: And if I could interject just for  
13 a minute?

14 MR. CHHATRE: Sure.

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I'm not exactly certain about  
16 this, but I think on the police 911 calls, it actually happened at  
17 2:29, which would have given a few seconds or a minute to make  
18 that call from the police --

19 MR. CHHATRE: Yes.

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: -- to the fire dispatch, which  
21 would have been the 2:31 call.

22 MR. CHHATRE: Um-hum. That would make sense.

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: But I think the 911 --

24 MR. NICHOLSON: Yeah, there is a 2:29 in this somewhere  
25 I came across, in one of these.

1 CHIEF WHITMER: Well, the create date is 2:29.

2 MR. NICHOLSON: Oh, okay. Maybe that's what I was --

3 CHIEF WHITMER: Up here at the top.

4 MR. CHHATRE: Can we get -- what is --

5 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You have it.

6 MR. CHHATRE: I have it, okay.

7 MR. NICHOLSON: Well, you've got two sheets in front of  
8 you. Are those both fire department -- I don't even know why we  
9 have two.

10 CHIEF WHITMER: This is -- this looks like it's more of  
11 a narrative, and this is more of units that are being dispatched.

12 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay.

13 CHIEF WHITMER: This has all of our, you know, all of  
14 our engines, our rescue units, when they're being dispatched and  
15 going in service --

16 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay.

17 CHIEF WHITMER: -- in and out, that kind of thing.

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: And you also have the 911 records  
19 4 hours before and 2 hours after.

20 MR. CHHATRE: Yeah, we asked for that.

21 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

22 BY MR. CHHATRE:

23 Q. So at the final tally, do we know how many people were  
24 injured? I know one deceased, one serious.

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. And how many are total?

2 A. I don't have -- I do not know the condition of any of  
3 the patients.

4 Q. No, not the condition, but how many total people  
5 injured, the total number of injuries? We are getting the number  
6 seven and eight. So I'm just trying to narrow that down.

7 A. I -- to be honest with you, I'm not sure. I know that  
8 we made a tally at the end of how many people we had transported  
9 off the scene, and with the patient that we extricated at the end,  
10 at the time I left the scene, we had counted nine.

11 Q. Nine.

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Okay. Because we haven't heard anything after probably  
14 the rescue operation was finished. So out of that nine, one is  
15 deceased, one is seriously injured --

16 A. Critical.

17 Q. -- at the hospital. Critical.

18 A. Um-hum.

19 Q. And the other seven released.

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Okay. That helps. Now you also mentioned that when you  
22 were dispatched, there was no mention of explosion? When you  
23 left?

24 A. Now, if I remember our dispatch -- I'm seeing something  
25 on here that might help you that's why I was -- if you'll bear

1 with me for just a second.

2 Q. Sure.

3 A. Okay. This is going back to the initial dispatch.

4 There was an initial entry here of 2:29.

5 Q. That's what you said, okay.

6 A. And it says phone number changed to, and I'm not sure  
7 what that means, but I believe that these are contact phone  
8 numbers of people calling in, 2:29 and 35 seconds. And then  
9 there's an entry of recommendation viewed, number of units in  
10 recommendation. So that's our dispatcher probably putting the  
11 information into their computer, typing in the addresses to see  
12 what dispatch is going to be.

13 All right. Then the incident was actually created --  
14 okay, it was created at 2:29 and 0 seconds. Then 26 seconds  
15 later, at 2:29 and 26 seconds, the recommendation is Engine 12,  
16 19, 26, Quint 27, Battalion 3, Rescue 12 and safety officer. And  
17 then dispatch time, it's actually a second before that. We were  
18 actually dispatched at 2:29 and 25 seconds.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Okay.

21 Q. Right, because I think the incident was created at  
22 2:29:00.

23 A. Um-hum. Yes, sir.

24 Q. So that will make --

25 A. Yes, sir.

1           Q. I mean even though there's a one second discrepancy, it  
2 still makes sense --

3           A. Yeah.

4           Q. -- that somebody was dispatched. Okay.

5           MR. NICHOLSON: It was coded just as a structure fire?

6           CHIEF WHITMER: Yes, uh-huh. And it was dispatched I  
7 believe as an apartment -- well, as a structure, an apartment. I  
8 don't recall. And the reason for that, on the initial dispatch --  
9 they tone us out and it is middle of the night. Sometimes you  
10 hear the whole dispatch and sometimes you don't, but you know it's  
11 a fire call just because of the units that are assigned, rather  
12 than a regular EMS call.

13          MR. CHHATRE: Um-hum.

14          CHIEF WHITMER: Does that make sense?

15          MR. CHHATRE: Um-hum.

16          CHIEF WHITMER: Like a regular EMS call will be an  
17 engine and a rescue unit or an ambulance, where as when we hear  
18 multiple engine companies, we know we're going on something like a  
19 structure fire. En route they changed -- they updated the  
20 dispatch to possible persons trapped, okay, if I remember  
21 correctly. And the reason for that was they changed it to a heavy  
22 rescue response, and that's normally what we'll do when we have  
23 reports of people trapped. So I'm assuming that our dispatchers  
24 had gotten information of an explosion and then the callers were  
25 saying there must be a lot of people in there. That's probably

1 the way those kinds of things come in.

2           Personally, that area that we were going into, when we  
3 have fires over there, they're usually contained to one room, a  
4 kitchen, a bedroom. They're all block and brick construction,  
5 concrete, and the fire just does not travel. It's usually  
6 contained and it's usually a pretty easy go in and put it out and  
7 come out. I would say maybe four blocks away on Georgia Road,  
8 coming in, we saw the tower of fire and we realized, you know,  
9 that this was different.

10           MR. CHHATRE: Yeah.

11           CHIEF WHITMER: Normally you're not going to see that in  
12 Gate City.

13           BY MR. CHHATRE:

14           Q. So when do you estimate the last -- I guess the recovery  
15 at the time, body recovery, what time the female victim was pulled  
16 out roughly?

17           A. Yes, sir. Let me -- I know I reported on the -- I did  
18 report when we had one person extricated, and that's why I'm  
19 looking through here to see if they put that in. That'll give us  
20 an exact time of when the first person came out. I don't -- I  
21 know that I did not report when the second person was pulled out.  
22 I'm going back and forth. If you'll give me a second. I don't  
23 see it in here.

24           Q. Okay.

25           A. So I don't have an exact time.

1 Q. Okay. Now you also mentioned something about the alarm,  
2 fire. Can you explain the reason for one alarm, two alarm fire,  
3 how you classify that?

4 A. Yeah. Do you mind, can I take a break and use the  
5 restroom?

6 MR. NICHOLSON: Oh, of course.

7 MR. CHHATRE: Sure.

8 MR. NICHOLSON: Let's go off the record, and we'll take  
9 a break.

10 (Off the record.)

11 (On the record.)

12 MR. NICHOLSON: We're back on the record. Part 2 of  
13 Battalion Chief John Whitmer.

14 BY MR. CHHATRE:

15 Q. Okay. We were talking about alarms.

16 A. Okay.

17 Q. How do you kind of give that designation?

18 A. Right. A single alarm is what we use for an ordinary  
19 structure fire, residential fire, and it consists of three engine  
20 companies, one truck company, a battalion chief, a rescue unit and  
21 safety officer, and if we see that we needed additional help,  
22 additional resources, we'll call for a second alarm, which is just  
23 a repeat of that same dispatch.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. Three more engine companies and a ladder truck. We have



1 the option of also just picking and choosing. If we need -- if we  
2 feel like we just need some more manpower, we'll call for another  
3 engine company or we'll call for a truck company or something like  
4 that.

5 Q. Okay. And what about, I think, third alarm or -- I'm  
6 just trying to understand the designation, how far you go.

7 A. Well, it -- we could go three, four alarms, and still  
8 have enough resources --

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. -- in the city. Normally past two alarms -- we have had  
11 some fires that go three alarms, and they're usually large  
12 warehouses that require a lot of equipment and a lot of manpower.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. So -- and again, every alarm, every second and third  
15 alarms you strike, you're just multiplying that number.

16 Q. Okay. So it's pretty much --

17 A. Three, 6, 9, 12 engines.

18 Q. -- how many times you are getting the personnel and  
19 equipment, and pretty much that's how it is?

20 A. Um-hum, yes.

21 Q. Now I'm a little confused. I do not know the hierarchy.  
22 I think you have some chiefs and then the battalion chief, and can  
23 you describe all those different things?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Or you can give it us; it doesn't matter.

1 A. Okay. We have the fire chief of the fire department.

2 Q. Okay. So he is in charge of the whole station?

3 A. He's in charge of the whole department. We have --

4 Q. Whole department.

5 A. -- 31 fire stations.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. Yes, sir.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. We have assistant chiefs, which fall under the battalion  
10 chief and -- I'm sorry. The assistant chiefs are under the fire  
11 chief.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. And they have different tasks. We have an assistant  
14 chief of operations, EMS, those sorts of things.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. Then next down on the order is battalion chief.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. And a battalion chief can be an operations battalion  
19 chief like myself. We work a 24-hour shift. We make fire calls  
20 and -- anything that happens we respond on.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. So -- and then from there on down, then we have  
23 captains, which each fire station has a captain that's over the --  
24 they oversee the whole fire station to make sure all of the things  
25 that need to be done are done at the station --

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. -- work and tasks, those sorts of things.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. And then from there, you get to a company officer which  
5 is a lieutenant.

6 Q. Okay. Okay. And they're in charge of each engine?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. Um-hum.

10 Q. Great. Do you have a protocol in the fire department as  
11 to how to establish the incident command --

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. -- who becomes incident commander automatically or by --

14 A. Yes. Um-hum.

15 Q. Can we get a copy of that document?

16 A. Sure. Yes.

17 Q. You can e-mail it to us or mail it to us.

18 A. Right.

19 MR. NICHOLSON: What is this document called?

20 CHIEF WHITMER: Well, we have two policies. One of them  
21 is -- the specific name of it, one of them is incident -- I think  
22 it's incident command, and then -- what's the long one about  
23 operations?

24 CAPT. WILLIAMS: Like I say, I know the main one we use  
25 is incident command.

1 CHIEF WHITMER: Yeah.

2 BY MR. CHHATRE:

3 Q. We'll just call it incident command documents --

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. -- and then you can send both or whatever.

6 A. Well, there's two policies. One of them actually, the  
7 incident command policy sort of lays out the hierarchy and how we  
8 establish command and all kind of thing.

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah, operations.

10 BY MR. CHHATRE:

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. But we also have a policy that goes over, actually  
13 spells out how you set up command and do all those sorts of  
14 things that are involved. Yes.

15 Q. And does the Alagasco send you any brochures about their  
16 pipelines, where their pipelines are located, any information, and  
17 how often that dialogue happens?

18 A. I would say probably every 6 months we get information  
19 updated.

20 Q. Okay. And what does that information contain? I mean,  
21 if you don't know it, you can send it or --

22 A. Yeah, I mean, it -- a lot of that information goes to  
23 our hazmat stations and they'll receive that information. It goes  
24 to the battalion chiefs, and it's really up to the battalion  
25 chiefs to disseminate it down to the actual stations themselves.

1 Q. Okay. And do you know what the information contains?

2 A. No. I mean, it could vary. It's not a set standard.  
3 It's not a standard form that you see all the time.

4 Q. Okay. But it doesn't come to all your, what, 31 fire  
5 stations?

6 A. No.

7 Q. Nothing comes directly to fire stations?

8 A. No.

9 Q. Okay. And do you have drills with Alagasco about fires  
10 involving their distribution pipelines?

11 A. No.

12 Q. So no drills, no information? Okay.

13 A. I've never been involved in that type of thing.

14 Q. Okay. So if you don't have any information from them  
15 directly, you guys don't convey how your incident command  
16 structure works to Alagasco?

17 A. No.

18 Q. There's no dialogue, I guess?

19 A. That's correct, yes.

20 Q. And how often, I guess, information plus your  
21 background, you have so many years of experience -- you don't  
22 really have much to show for your age, but in your experience, how  
23 often you have worked with Alagasco people on fires?

24 A. Just -- it's on an incident or situation basis. I mean,  
25 we work on them fairly regularly when we have gas leaks, when we

1 get called, you know, a broken line, those sorts of things.  
2 That's most of the time what our interaction is, when they come  
3 out and we standby until they, you know, fix a break or fix a  
4 leak. We have had incidents in the past -- I haven't been  
5 involved in them -- where we've had leaks in houses where we've  
6 had, you know, a fire or something like that.

7 Q. Um-hum.

8 A. So I can't speak as to, you know, the dealings with  
9 those types of incidents.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. But I know whenever we have an incident, when we have a  
12 gas leak out on the street or a vehicle has a wreck and knocks a  
13 vent pipe over or something like that, they're always quick to  
14 respond and we, you know, we work together with them.

15 Q. But I'm talking like fires, not necessarily of this  
16 magnitude, but house fires or --

17 A. Again, this is probably the -- going back a long way,  
18 this is the first time I've been in charge or command of a fire  
19 where we've had something --

20 Q. Alagasco involved?

21 A. Yes, yes.

22 Q. Okay. So do you know approximately when the structure  
23 fire was put out?

24 A. I'm sorry?

25 Q. Approximate time when this structure fire, except that I

1     guess the meter fire --

2           A.     Yeah.  I don't see where -- again, I reported that the  
3     fire was under control.  I remember that.  I don't see that in my  
4     dispatcher's notes.

5           Q.     That's fine.  If you recall.

6           A.     I'm going -- I would say probably by 4:00.

7           Q.     Okay, 4 a.m.

8           A.     Um-hum.

9           Q.     And that is all the Alpha, Bravo, Charlie and Delta?

10          A.     Yes.

11          Q.     Except the burner fire.

12          A.     Right.

13          Q.     And did the burner fire --

14          A.     I'm sorry.  Here it is, sir.

15          Q.     Okay.

16          A.     3:16.

17          Q.     Oh, 3:16.

18          A.     Yes.  And then --

19                 MR. NICHOLSON:  3:16?

20                 CHIEF WHITMER:  Yes.

21                 MR. NICHOLSON:  All the structure fires were out.  Is  
22     that what you said?

23                 CHIEF WHITMER:  Pardon?

24                 MR. NICHOLSON:  3:16.

25                 CHIEF WHITMER:  Um-hum.  Yeah.

1 MR. NICHOLSON: Oh, okay.

2 BY MR. CHHATRE:

3 Q. That's almost -- less than 45 minutes, or close to --

4 A. Reported fire under control at 3:16 and then one gas  
5 line still burning at 3:17.

6 Q. Okay. Now did that gas line burning, did that hamper  
7 any of your recovery and rescue efforts on the other side?

8 A. No. In fact, while the gas line was still burning -- we  
9 actually did move some crews to this section. We started clearing  
10 some debris off of that top -- off the top of the slab because  
11 there were some mattresses and furniture. We wanted --

12 Q. Smoldering?

13 A. Yeah. Well, if we had somebody there, we wanted to make  
14 sure that -- we could get to them there. We just could not get to  
15 them from underneath.

16 Q. Further. So if these people were trapped on the Delta  
17 side you'd have a problem?

18 A. If they had been trapped here?

19 Q. Or on the front corner. Exactly, that --

20 A. It would have been a problem anywhere up underneath that  
21 slab. It would have been a problem, yes.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. And I think, if you -- I know you've been to the scene.  
24 Until you got to about halfway back -- this was maybe no more of  
25 maybe 8 to 10 inches of clearance, not even enough room to put



1     somebody up under there.

2           Q.     Right.

3           A.     Now back towards the back part, we might have had maybe  
4     2 feet of clearance.

5           Q.     Yeah. I could see some plants from that gap on the back  
6     side.

7           A.     Yeah.

8           Q.     Do you recall when Alagasco personnel arrived on the  
9     scene?

10          A.     That is -- I saw that in the -- I've got 3:27.

11                 MR. NICHOLSON: Yeah, we said earlier 3:27.

12                 BY MR. CHHATRE:

13          Q.     That's what I thought. I wanted to confirm. I was  
14     writing down notes too fast.

15          A.     Yes, that's what I have in my notes here.

16          Q.     Okay. And that's all I have.

17          A.     Okay.

18          Q.     Thank you so much.

19          A.     Yes, sir.

20          Q.     I've learned so much today and I really think maybe I  
21     should be leaving now.

22          A.     I understand.

23          Q.     I guess if we have any more questions, I'm sure we can  
24     call on you.

25          A.     Sure.

1 Q. Thank you so much.

2 A. That phone number I gave you is -- that's actually my  
3 cell phone number. So if you need --

4 MR. NICHOLSON: Oh, on the record is your personal --

5 CHIEF WHITMER: Yes, right.

6 MR. NICHOLSON: -- cell? Oh, okay.

7 MR. CHHATRE: We can have it -- we can redact it.

8 MR. NICHOLSON: Let's go off the record for a second.

9 (Off the record.)

10 (On the record.)

11 MR. NICHOLSON: Back on the record. Part 3, Battalion  
12 Chief John Whitmer. PSC, if you'd like to take your turn?

13 MR. BLACKWOOD: We have no questions.

14 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay.

15 MR. GARDNER: I have no questions.

16 BY MR. NICHOLSON:

17 Q. Okay. I did have one follow-up that --

18 A. Sure.

19 Q. -- I think this goes back to what Ravi was kind of  
20 getting at, and I think -- I mean, based on your time, the  
21 structure fire is out at 3:16, which is 10 minutes or so before  
22 Alagasco's even on site, and you've got the riser fire going. I  
23 think Ravi was getting at, if you had victims over on the Delta  
24 side and you still had a riser fire going, that hinders your  
25 ability to get to those victims if, hypothetically, if they're

1     alive.   And did you have a -- is there a backup plan?

2           A.    Well, it did not hinder our initial search --

3           Q.    Sure.

4           A.    -- at all.

5           Q.    Because you accessed from Bravo.

6           A.    We accessed from the rear of the Delta side.

7           Q.    Oh, okay.

8           A.    We laddered the rear part.   The conditions of the front  
9   part of the apartment with the collapse were such that unless I  
10   had verified live -- information that were was somebody alive in  
11   there, I wasn't going to put any of my personnel under that slab.

12          Q.    Yeah.   The slab was your biggest problem there.

13          A.    Yes.

14          Q.    Right.

15          A.    The integrity of the structure.   We'll -- and this is --  
16   I mean, you'll hear this phrase.   We'll risk a life to save a  
17   life.

18          Q.    Sure.

19          A.    And that's kind of what we base the way we operate.   Our  
20   assumption at that point was that with the amount of destruction,  
21   fire, water, that this was going to be a body recovery operation  
22   once the fire was out.

23          Q.    Okay.

24          A.    Just based on experience.

25          Q.    But if the slab hadn't fallen, if the slab didn't create

1 that difficulty, if it was just a riser fire and the second floor  
2 remained intact, I guess we're just trying to ascertain how much  
3 of a --

4 A. How much of a hindrance would that gas line have been?

5 Q. Yeah, that gas may be, or can you go out there and just  
6 -- do you ever close them or --

7 A. Sure.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. If the valve is still intact we can do that.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. And our hazmat units have got expandable -- I'm trying  
12 to think what you might call that.

13 Q. Like a plug or --

14 A. Yes. That we -- and we can do that even before Alagasco  
15 gets on the scene.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. But they were, you know, they were already there.

18 Q. Sure.

19 A. So, I mean, we do rescue all the time in fire  
20 conditions. We have the gear for it. We have the ability to do  
21 that. So, I mean, if we thought that there was somebody under  
22 there or we could have had good access, I would say that the gas  
23 line would not have been a hindrance because we still could have  
24 gone in and performed a rescue.

25 Q. Okay. But it just sounded like earlier you could even

1 put hoses on it, extinguish the fire and keep the gas kind of  
2 dissipated. Is that --

3 A. Well, in that --

4 Q. -- something you guys do?

5 A. That's just an operational -- I mean, we've -- we know  
6 that if we've got gas burning, it's just better -- it's better to  
7 leave it burning because if we extinguish the flame and then we  
8 have a large amount of gas leak out and it reignites, then we  
9 could have another possible --

10 Q. Sure.

11 A. -- explosion.

12 Q. Right.

13 A. So we want to keep it burning until the gas line is shut  
14 off.

15 Q. Okay. So you're not fully reliant on Alagasco being out  
16 there to shut off a riser fire like that?

17 A. No, and I would -- I mean, we go on ordinary structures  
18 all the time where -- I mean, if it's not involved in the gas, we  
19 turn -- we turn the gas lines off anytime we have a structure  
20 fire.

21 Q. Right.

22 A. It's one of the first things we do. We call for the  
23 power company and I'll send somebody to shut the gas off.

24 Q. Right.

25 A. But that's a different issue. That's just a regular

1 residential fire.

2 Q. Right. A fire started from other source --

3 A. Yeah, yeah.

4 Q. -- and it's knocked out the gas meter.

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. But in that case, you said it wasn't ignited either,  
7 right?

8 A. Yeah, that's correct.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. That's just a safety thing that we do. You're talking  
11 about operating with gas lines --

12 Q. Right.

13 A. -- or us operating around gas lines. But --

14 Q. If it is ignited, you said the hazmat unit has the  
15 ability to come out --

16 A. They do.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. They have that capability.

19 Q. All right.

20 A. But if we have Alagasco on the scene --

21 Q. I understand.

22 A. -- that's their baby. We let them handle it.

23 Q. Okay. All right.

24 MR. GARDNER: Right. Because the hazmat unit has the  
25 same plug as --

1 CHIEF WHITMER: They're compression plugs.

2 BY MR. NICHOLSON:

3 Q. Sure.

4 A. They fit down inside a pipe and you tighten them up --

5 Q. They expand.

6 A. -- and they expand. Right.

7 MR. GARDNER: The same one they used on the scene to  
8 plug down, but it didn't hold and they had to come back and  
9 re-tack it.

10 CHIEF WHITMER: Right. I guess getting back to what  
11 you're asking me, is, Alagasco, they're the experts with their gas  
12 lines and their equipment.

13 MR. NICHOLSON: Sure.

14 CHIEF WHITMER: So if I have them on the scene, I'm  
15 going to always defer to them to take care of that situation, and  
16 that's kind of the way we operate.

17 BY MR. NICHOLSON:

18 Q. Right, but I'm going to the extreme.

19 A. Right.

20 Q. If they're delayed for whatever reason and they don't  
21 make it on scene, it sounds like you have another means of  
22 getting --

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. -- the gas off?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. And that is -- I mean, there are some constraints to  
3 that. I mean, it has to be a pipe that's intact and in good  
4 shape.

5 Q. Sure.

6 A. You know, most of the -- a lot of times we go to  
7 something that's been run over by a dozer or backhoe, I mean it's  
8 a shredded pipe that we don't have good access to. There's  
9 nothing we can do about that. This is if we have a clean pipe  
10 with a clean break that we have access to and we can get that  
11 compression fitting in there, then, yeah, we can handle that. But  
12 other than that, that's really the only capability we have if  
13 there's not a valve in place.

14 Q. Right. Yeah, if it's something more extreme, broken  
15 main or something else --

16 A. Right. Yes.

17 Q. -- you're not equipped to deal with that.

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. Okay.

20 MR. BLACKWOOD: I have one.

21 MR. NICHOLSON: You've got a follow-up? PSC.

22 BY MR. BLACKWOOD:

23 Q. Back to what he was saying, if Alagasco is not on site,  
24 do you give them a courtesy call and say, hey, we're fixing to  
25 turn your valve, even if it's at a riser?



1           A.    If -- now is this at the fire -- if it's involving fire  
2 with the gas?

3           Q.    This is if it's involving fire with a gas. I'm just  
4 trying to figure out your procedure. Say you go to a house fire,  
5 the structure is on fire but the gas is not ignited.

6           A.    Okay. No.

7           Q.    You don't turn that off without their authority,  
8 correct?

9           A.    No, we will turn it off without their authority.

10          Q.    Okay. What about underground valves?

11          A.    No.

12          Q.    Do you ever turn underground valves?

13          A.    No.

14          Q.    Okay. That's my -- that was my main thing is to get to  
15 the underground valves so I could understand what you all do.

16          A.    Well, again using the situation, if we realize that  
17 there's a valve there -- let's say we have a gas fire and we have  
18 a wreck and it's impending on that car, impinging on that car, and  
19 we know we can shut it off, we would do that, but we would always  
20 call Alagasco to come out, you know, because we're operating their  
21 equipment.

22          Q.    Okay.

23          A.    But that's a life safety issue.

24          Q.    Yes.

25          A.    We will do extreme things for life safety.

1           Q.    Yes, sir. I understand. I just wanted to make that  
2 clear for our records there. So thank you.

3           A.    Yes.

4           MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. You finished?  
5 Bob?

6           MR. GARDNER: I'm good.

7           MR. NICHOLSON: No?

8           MR. GARDNER: Thank you.

9           MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. I think at this point we'll  
10 conclude the interview.

11          CHIEF WHITMER: Okay.

12          MR. NICHOLSON: Thanks so much, John.

13          CHIEF WHITMER: Um-hum.

14          (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

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 John Whitmer

DOCKET NUMBER:           DCA-14-MP-001

PLACE:                    Birmingham, Alabama

DATE:                     December 22, 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.

---

Kathryn A. Mirfin  
Transcriber