

**Record of Conversations – Lexington County Fire
RRD18MR003**

On the morning of February 8, 2018 FRA Chief Inspector Mark Williams and Mechanical Engineer John Manutes spoke with Battalion Chief David Dorroh of the Lexington County Fire Service.

Chief Dorroh was on call and asleep at the fire station when they “got the tone” at approximately 2:40am. They were dispatched to a “train incident” by the county dispatcher. Chief Dorroh assigned himself, Ladder 5, and Engine 12 to go to the scene, approximately 3-miles from the station. While he was traveling to the scene he learned that the accident was a freight train and passenger train impact. He put HazMat crews on notice that he may need them because he knew the types of chemicals transported in the area. He also responded to the Graniteville derailment several years ago and was concerned about possible hazardous materials. Before arriving to the scene, he was contacted by Columbia District Fire Chief about a 911 call they received. Chief Dorroh stated 3 departments received 911 calls for the accident. Chief Dorroh asked Columbia to stay on stand-by for possible additional help or to cover any additional incidents that may happen during the night, but requested that they allow him to assess the scene first.

The firefighters arrived on Pine Ridge Road on the north side of the railroad tracks. Chief Dorroh’s initial response was to assist the dozens of passengers coming off of the train. After approximately 10-minutes he set up a unified command center and crossed to the south side of the tracks with his vehicle (over the Charleston Road bridge). The firefighter’s initial objective was to keep people away from the tracks and diesel fuel and to get them in a safe location. He stated that he did not require assistance from additional fire department personnel, either his own or from other areas, because there were so many sheriff deputies helping on scene. However, Columbia did send their heavy rescue unit which included a four-wheel ATV. Chief Dorroh’s squad also set up temporary lighting.

Chief Dorroh did not enter the train. He stated at least 11 people under his command performed a minimum of 3 sweeps of the cars. His firefighters met with the Amtrak Assistant Conductor (AC), who they found observing the deceased between the locomotives. Firefighters were able to determine the Amtrak engineer and conductor were deceased immediately. They moved the AC to a safe area. The AC informed the fire crew that the first coach and the dining car were not carrying passengers. He was able to bring up a passenger manifest on his phone and tell fire crews how many passengers were in each car. The fire fighters only entered the cars through doors, they did not remove any windows. Chief Dorroh did not observe any passengers exiting through windows. The fire department extracted 8 to 10 people who needed assistance alighting from the 2 rear coach cars. They waited for backboards to arrive from EMS in order to transport people who couldn’t walk. No one was physically trapped in the car. At least one young woman had a broken tibia with the bone showing.

Chief Dorroh stated that approximately 8 ambulances transported the most critical patients to the hospitals. A large majority of the less-critical patients were transported by sheriff vehicles. Lexington provided 2-3 vehicle and Richland County provided 2 vehicles and a bus. Twenty-seven people were transported uninjured via bus to the Lexington County Parks building where a relief center was manned by Red Cross and others.

Chief Dorroh stated that Mass Casualty Incident training and exercises have been conducted in the past, but not in the past year. He remembers getting training from CSX on rail incidents, but not from Amtrak.

Chief Dorroh stated that in retrospect, he would have set up the unified command center faster. It took him about 10-minutes after arriving to set up the command center and then pass control of the command center to his assistant Battalion Chief. He also recalled looking up at the sky after the incident. He noticed the bridge and immediately regretted not staging trucks with additional lighting in the overhead position.

Chief Dorroh also stated that his Chief met with the CSX conductor who appeared to be shaken up and covered in fuel, but otherwise uninjured. The fire department did not have contact with the CSX engineer.

Chief Dorroh stated that everyone on scene was a career firefighter. The department has a few volunteers but they were not on scene.

We thanked Chief Dorroh for his service and his time, and the conversation ended.