

## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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ALABAMA GAS CORPORATION (ALAGASCO)

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NATURAL GAS LEAK WITH IGNITION

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Docket No.: DCA-14-MP-001

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

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DECEMBER 17, 2013

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Interview of: ROBERT WALL

Alagasco Center for Energy  
Technology  
Birmingham, Alabama

Saturday,  
December 21, 2013

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: MATTHEW NICHOLSON  
Investigator-in-Charge

## APPEARANCES:

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Alabama Public Service Commission

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Fire Investigations Bureau  
Birmingham, Alabama

MICHAEL BELL  
(Representative on behalf of Mr. Wall)

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## I N T E R V I E W

MR. NICHOLSON: Good afternoon. Today is Saturday, December 21st, 2013. My name is Matthew Nicholson, and I am an investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board, Washington, D.C. We are currently in Birmingham, Alabama at the Alagasco Center for Energy Technology, investigating the Birmingham, Alabama natural gas leak with ignition which occurred on December 17th, 2013. This is case number DCA-14-MP-001. We are here today to interview Rob Wall.

For the record, Rob, please state your first and last name with the spelling?

MR. WALL: Robert Wall, R-o-b-e-r-t, W-a-l-l.

MR. NICHOLSON: Thanks. And if you would, please state for the record your title, employer and a business contact number?

MR. WALL: Supervisor with Alagasco.

MR. NICHOLSON: A business e-mail or a phone number, please?

MR. WALL: Business e-mail will be

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MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. Rob, you're allowed to have one person of your choice present for these interviews. If you could indicate for the record, please, who you've chosen to be your representative?

MR. WALL: Mike.

MR. BELL: Bell.

1 MR. WALL: Bell.

2 MR. NICHOLSON: Bell, okay. We'll go around the room  
3 now, everyone introduce themselves. My name is Matthew Nicholson.  
4 I am with the NTSB.

5 MR. CHHATRE: Ravi Chhatre, Investigator, NTSB.

6 MR. BELL: Mike Bell, for Rob Wall.

7 MR. WILLIAMS: Willie Williams, Fire Investigator, City  
8 of Birmingham.

9 MR. LUPO: Tom Lupo, Mayor's Office.

10 MR. GARDNER: Bob Gardner, Alabama Gas.

11 MR. BLACKMAN: Keith Blackwood, Alabama Public Service  
12 Commission.

13 MR. JONES: Wallace Jones, Alabama Public Service  
14 Commission.

15 INTERVIEW OF ROBERT WALL

16 BY MR. NICHOLSON:

17 Q. Okay, Rob, just to begin with, maybe you could give us  
18 some background, when you started at Alagasco, some of the  
19 positions you've held?

20 A. I started 4/8 of 1991 as a crewman in construction, and  
21 I've never left the construction department.

22 Q. That's easy, okay. And your involvement, now, in the  
23 December 17th accident that we're here to talk about, could you  
24 kind of walk us through when you were notified, when you got on  
25 the scene. Just talk us through the day?

1           A.    Okay.  I was called at -- called and e-mailed  
2   approximately 4:53 a.m. the morning of the explosion.  I returned  
3   the call.  She told me what was going on, the dispatch, and I  
4   gathered up my things and headed out to the job site.  I got there  
5   approximately 15 minutes to 6:00, when I arrived on the scene, and  
6   started assessing what was going on and finding who was already  
7   out there and, you know, what they had discovered and hadn't  
8   discovered yet, you know, questions that needed to be answered or  
9   just to get caught up to speed.

10          Q.    Who did you speak to when you got out there?

11          A.    Okay, I run across Chris Hill, Robert Rumph, David  
12   Gallagher, and on my way in I called Bill Robertson (ph.) and  
13   asked him if he had -- if he knew of what was going on, and that's  
14   where he directed -- he came in behind me.

15                The crews were out on site.  They was digging and  
16   looking for the gas service, which was still blowing at the time.  
17   And so we was having trouble, with all the debris in the water,  
18   trying to locate the piping off the main that was tied in.  And my  
19   take is -- well, I said let it blow because if there is something  
20   that's been pulled or snatched from the explosion, you're just  
21   letting it vent.  Venting up is not a bad thing.

22          Q.    Right.

23          A.    If we cap it off, then we're stopping it and there may  
24   be something underground that we don't know at the time.  So we  
25   let it blow for approximately another hour until we got good

1 daylight to see what we had, and then the decision was made to  
2 valve it off. And then we started trying to narrow down our  
3 leakage and see what we had, so we just started doing -- I started  
4 doing half-moons. That's how I've always done. The building sits  
5 here. Well, I start covering, sweeping back and forth.

6 Q. Well, I want to back up a second because you said it was  
7 blowing from --

8 A. We valved it off.

9 Q. -- the riser. Okay, you valved it off?

10 A. Yeah, we valved that off. In other words, the blow that  
11 was coming out of the riser.

12 Q. Right.

13 A. The cutoff was still intact.

14 Q. But wouldn't you have -- what made you go do the --  
15 you're talking about a leak survey with the half moon?

16 A. In other words, bar testing.

17 Q. Bar test. But why would you -- what made you want to  
18 bar test when it looked like the source of the gas was coming out  
19 of a riser?

20 A. Well, you -- right now, you don't know, so you don't  
21 narrow your options down to one thing.

22 Q. Okay, okay.

23 A. You cover all your bases, and that's what I was taught  
24 from day 1.

25 Q. Terrific.

1           A.    So we've got that valved off, but we don't know until we  
2 start putting down bar holes are we clear underground also.

3           Q.    So I'm going to ask you maybe to go to the board and --  
4 when we start talking bar holes, it's hard to have a conversation  
5 without a picture. We've already got one started here.

6           A.    Okay, this is --

7           Q.    That's what he did there.

8           A.    Right. This is the unit that collapsed?

9           Q.    Right.

10          A.    And that's the tree that they're --

11          Q.    That's the tree, yep. So can you show us where you're  
12 doing your -- the half-moons?

13          A.    Okay.

14          A.    We already had a crew that was trying to find this  
15 service. You had a riser here that was blowing we capped off.  
16 You had another meter and riser here.

17          Q.    Right.

18          A.    So we were trying to find -- while this crew was trying  
19 to find that, and we got that blow stopped here, and it gets  
20 quieted down and we got a little daylight. I've always been --  
21 I'm looking -- I knew the main was here, as best we could tell.  
22 We had pulled some prints and found out. I'd worked in this area  
23 over the years. And so when we started checking everything -- I  
24 do like a little perimeter sweep. I'll just get a punch bar  
25 or --now I'll direct somebody to do it, since I'm supervision.

1 Q. Right.

2 A. But I said, okay, let's get a punch bar hole here and we  
3 just start doing perimeters. In other words, I call them half-  
4 moons.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. Well, we hit on some gas around this tree, so we got to  
7 looking, and when it -- so when it got a little daylight and when  
8 they eased the water back, you could start picking up a little bit  
9 of a smell. So I'm going back and forth, and we started picking  
10 up a bubble, a little bubble that was just popping out of the  
11 corner of the sidewalk.

12 Q. Okay, a bubble in the water actually?

13 A. Right. So you get a little bubble.

14 Q. Yeah.

15 A. Which says to me, okay, that's either the water pushing  
16 in and forcing the air out or it's gas, one of the two, so that  
17 gives me a starting point. So we locate this line. Your main's  
18 running approximately through here. All right, so the bubble's  
19 here, so when everything got quiet and the water had ceased  
20 somewhat, I got to looking, and you started showing a bubble and a  
21 bubble and a bubble and a bubble and a bubble, and I think there's  
22 that sidewalk, and it stopped along right in here. And it was --  
23 what it was, that ditch line you had little bubbles that was  
24 seeping out of the ground, just pop, pop, pop, pop, pop. I call  
25 it percolating.

1 Q. Yeah.

2 A. It was perking.

3 Q. But you say it looks like it deviated from the line and  
4 kind of walked up towards the --

5 A. Well, yeah. See, right here you've got a inlet storm  
6 drain. There was a storm drain right here. So that means there's  
7 going to be underground piping right here through -- it was a  
8 concrete drain.

9 Q. Right.

10 A. So that gives it room to -- when you're crossing right  
11 here, that gives it room to run, to travel.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. So the piping is probably not going to be deep under the  
14 ground, and then you had this concrete sidewalk sitting here, all  
15 this, so there's access for it to walk and move around, and it was  
16 coming up out of the cracks, wherever the little rubber is between  
17 the sidewalk and curb.

18 Q. Yes.

19 A. There'll be a little rubber expansion --

20 Q. Expansion joint or something?

21 A. Right. And so then when I got to seeing that, that's  
22 when I started trying to -- I just start watching and looking and  
23 then you started noticing the little pops, that they went back  
24 here, one up here, one -- and it just stays right in that original  
25 ditch line.

1 Q. And these are all bubbles? You're not even bar hole  
2 testing?

3 A. Not yet.

4 Q. You're just seeing bubbles, okay.

5 A. I'm just seeing bubbles and I'm smelling the gas, and  
6 that's -- when I do the initial survey, I'm walking and looking,  
7 and that's what drove me to right here was that. So there's my  
8 starting point.

9 Now this crew is doing the locating of lines.

10 Q. Right.

11 A. You know. So you've got somebody on this, you've got  
12 somebody on this. So when I found this and started seeing this, I  
13 started -- we started locating to that, sprayed the yellow paint  
14 there, getting a better feed on it, because there's a patch here.

15 Q. What does that mean, putting yellow paint down?

16 A. Spray paint. In other words, marking --

17 MR. CHHATRE: Gas line.

18 MR. WALL: Locating -- yeah.

19 MR. NICHOLSON: Oh, just locating the line.

20 MR. WALL: Yeah.

21 BY MR. NICHOLSON:

22 Q. Not locating bar hole points?

23 A. No, locating the line.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. And then we got -- there's a patch in the street that

1 we've cut years ago with some old existing bar holes, so that's  
2 how you know -- that's a give-away right there, well, we know our  
3 main is here because there's previous work. So we lined up and  
4 the little bubbles actually lined up the main perfectly. It just  
5 stayed right in the ditch line. There was no deviation of bubbles  
6 anywhere. It was just strictly -- so we started knocking holes  
7 down, bar holes, and separating it, and we got a good leak here  
8 and a good leak here.

9 Q. Wait, let's circle, maybe, where we've got good leaks.  
10 I'm going to take a picture of this later.

11 A. Okay, I'll make an X then. We had a good leak here and  
12 we was getting good gas here. This was blowing. Put your hand  
13 down there and you could feel it cool like gas coming up.

14 Q. Wow, okay.

15 A. This right here is -- when we got it, we started bar  
16 testing. This faded, though, somewhat. This didn't and this  
17 didn't. So we decided to dig it out right here. This is where  
18 that cracked main was found.

19 Q. Oh, okay.

20 A. And what the deal is, this tree, hackberry tree, had a  
21 root system with roots about that -- one root about that big. And  
22 roots did go down.

23 Q. Yeah.

24 A. And they travel the easiest access. Well, they travel  
25 better through dirt that's been dug before. That root was

1 constantly swirling over our main. It was constantly --

2 Q. What do you mean, wrapping around it?

3 A. It was wrapped around or it was growing besides it, it  
4 was growing on top. In other words, it was just like a noodle.

5 Q. Yeah.

6 A. It would lay on the side or on top. And see, so when  
7 you get that, you get the break here, the gas is traveling back to  
8 the tree. And so when we got this dug out, it was going to be --  
9 we're going to get this one first and then recheck. When we got  
10 this dug out and we got it ventilating to where it couldn't run  
11 the soil or the root anymore, this went away.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. And this right here faded. We had one more hole that we  
14 kept -- wanted them out, and we dug it out and there was nothing  
15 there. And then what it was, it was just pocketed up some.

16 Q. What kind of reading were you getting there?

17 A. We was getting like 79 percent gas.

18 Q. Seventy-nine percent gas?

19 A. Gas.

20 Q. And that's right by the sidewalk --

21 A. Right by --

22 Q. -- going up to 80?

23 A. Yeah, right where we dug up to the sidewalk because  
24 there was two vehicles parked here, and that's where the service  
25 line wound up. They found it. We cut and capped it right here.

1 Q. Right, okay. And then were you doing the bar hold test  
2 and this half-moon in the meantime?

3 A. So after we got this going and they got to digging this  
4 up, then we started assessing possibilities. Just keep on -- we'd  
5 just keep looking --

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. -- and keep checking because it was -- actually, I was  
8 told to do what I started. So I started all the way up here and I  
9 started bar holing. We just put holes down and just kind of  
10 stayed just -- not a certain pattern, but we'd fan away from  
11 the -- the debris field was here.

12 Q. Sure.

13 A. So we put one up against the debris field, a little  
14 farther back up off this corner, off this corner, and worked our  
15 way back all the way around, all the way up to the sidewalk right  
16 here. We was getting a high rate of gas for some reason -- I'm  
17 sorry -- a mistake. Right here. And it started showing a line  
18 and it was like we couldn't understand. And then here's that  
19 other sidewalk and then that other building up here.

20 Q. Wait, you're saying you're getting a line of readings  
21 here, right?

22 A. Right.

23 Q. But that's not a sidewalk?

24 A. No. That's just a -- I'm just drawing a line best to  
25 what --

1 Q. Sure.

2 A. That line is about to become something.

3 Q. Yeah.

4 A. So -- but the gas was -- what I was finding was when I  
5 would find it here, it would just -- the gas would go -- we'd get,  
6 say, a reading of 38 percent. You recheck it 3 seconds later and  
7 you was barely getting LEL. It was just (makes sound) and it  
8 would fall out. It wouldn't sustain itself.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. That was on anything. But we'd get a pothole here -- I  
11 mean a little bar test hole here, 88 percent. We'd get one here,  
12 I think it's like 89 percent. We'd get one right at the very  
13 corner and it was holding 93 percent.

14 Q. Ninety-three percent gas? That far away?

15 A. What's going on? So there's -- we're thinking, okay,  
16 there's a line somewhere.

17 Q. Uh-huh.

18 A. So we keep checking and it starts lining up. I said,  
19 well, let's just dig a hole and see what we do have in here.

20 Q. Yeah.

21 A. So we dig down about 2½ feet and there's a 3 or 4-inch  
22 PVC line.

23 Q. Okay. And what is that?

24 A. And we -- I think they discovered it was a water line,  
25 water main. At first we thought it was some kind of conduit run.

1 There was this line right here, it was shallow, but it was running  
2 straight across, you know -- and there's the debris field. It was  
3 running straight across and they had buried it with a sand bed all  
4 the way around it. So it was coming all the way to right here  
5 where our break was. And so, least point of resistance, and it  
6 gets in that sand bed --

7 Q. Right.

8 A. -- and it was running. But would it sustain leaks out  
9 here? Nothing out here sustained over one -- that's one reading.  
10 It would just come up and then fall out to -- then just fall out  
11 to nothing. This one stayed right here because it was piled up in  
12 that dang gravel bed.

13 Q. Well, it looks like you stayed sort of on the east side  
14 of this debris field?

15 A. Well, we stayed where the gas was telling us to stay.

16 Q. You didn't go to the front or --

17 A. Yeah, we worked our way around and that's where we  
18 worked the main. But, you know, pretty much it was like this, and  
19 then we did this, because our findings was telling us what we've  
20 got here. We had -- this wound up being nothing. This was a  
21 break. We dug a hole here just to assure there was nothing that  
22 wound up on the tree roots. We drilled on out and we was getting  
23 a higher rate here because this was a previous cut --

24 Q. It's a patch, yeah.

25 A. -- with a sand bed. So for overkill we dug it up and

1 found a minute fuzz on a wraparound and was able to take a -- we  
2 tightened the nuts up and it just -- it was, you know, very, very  
3 minute.

4 So that's how I assessed my situation, and we was trying  
5 to, you know, figure out why this was. If you get a high rate of  
6 gas here, there's got to be reasons. And there's your reason  
7 right there.

8 Q. That water line?

9 A. That buried water.

10 Q. Okay. But these readings all faded to LELs?

11 A. You would drive the bar down, put the leak detector in,  
12 and it would rush up to the peaked-out reading, and if you never  
13 pulled it out, it would go up. Say, the peak of this, it would go  
14 up 38 percent gas, shoo, and fall out to 10 or 15 percent LEL.  
15 You could pull the leak detector out, clear your leak detector,  
16 stick it back in and it might go to 3 percent LEL. This flow just  
17 faded away that quick. It sustained here and it sustained here.

18 Q. And the sustaining is even when this was exposed?

19 A. Because it was piled up in the sand. And that's -- that  
20 goes back now, that's called residual. But where at the time we  
21 don't know -- we're having to assess and build a map of what we're  
22 dealing with.

23 Q. And when you say "build a map," does that mean you  
24 actually documented?

25 A. Right. Just like this. In other words -- when I say

1 documented, all this was going on at that fast pace.

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. It's, "Why do we have gas here? Let's dig it up and  
4 take a look."

5 Q. Okay. But you weren't --

6 A. Because there's not supposed to --

7 Q. -- writing these down anywhere or --

8 A. Robert Rumph may have been. But at the time we was  
9 just -- you know, we're just kind of --

10 Q. You're directing your guys?

11 A. Right. It's just dig here, let's knock some more holes  
12 down, wonder why is this, and we've got to, you know, come up with  
13 your answers. And that was what -- so I got right here. And we  
14 found that dirt line -- I mean that sand bed right here with that  
15 water, and that was the reason, the only reason gas was getting  
16 from here to here.

17 Q. Did you take any readings on the north side of this  
18 alley here to see if --

19 A. Me personally and the guys I was directing, I didn't.  
20 They was doing the walking surveys with the --

21 Q. Oh, the flame packs?

22 A. Yeah, they had -- we had operators out doing this around  
23 the outside edges. We was concentrating inside this grassy area  
24 around the building.

25 Q. And so did you actually see the crack in --

1           A.    There was a crack on the bottom. Just a hairline. It  
2 wasn't a complete rain crack. In other words, a rain crack you  
3 can -- maybe you could put that eraser -- I mean on the --

4           Q.    There wasn't much clearance; is what you're saying?

5           A.    No. It was very, very minute.

6           Q.    But was it making a noise?

7           A.    Yeah, it's going to make a little hiss, yeah, but not --

8           Q.    Did you see them excavate it?

9           A.    Well, I was coming back and forth. While we had that  
10 going on, you know, I'm just kind of going back and forth because,  
11 you know, we've got one we're going to dig up. You know, let's  
12 not everybody stand still waiting to see.

13          Q.    Sure.

14          A.    So we're still looking and looking.

15          Q.    Did you see them cut the root away from it?

16          A.    Yes, I saw when they started digging up here. They dug  
17 up here and they started stripping back, and I saw them breaking  
18 the root out, because that's when I was -- when we discovered the  
19 root, that was the first thing everybody knows who's been --  
20 worked in the underground utilities, because you go, okay, there's  
21 that dang root.

22          Q.    Yeah.

23          A.    You know, the root of all our problems. Because it'll  
24 wrap around a main, it'll squeeze.

25          Q.    Right. So that root was actually circumferential with

1 the crack area?

2 A. It was laying right there on top of it.

3 Q. It was on top?

4 A. Um-hum.

5 Q. But the crack was at the bottom?

6 A. Yes. You know, pressure points --

7 MR. CHHATRE: What was the reading on the top; 95  
8 percent, you said?

9 MR. WALL: This was -- right at the corner it was 93.

10 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

11 BY MR. NICHOLSON:

12 Q. Can you write that up there so we just have a record of  
13 that?

14 A. And that was like 89 right there. And like I say -- and  
15 if you deviate it outside that ditch line, you know, you didn't  
16 get that. It would just up and fall out.

17 Q. Can you write -- that's 93 percent gas, right?

18 A. Yes, that's gas.

19 Q. If you can put that up there for clarity?

20 A. So you can tell I'm left handed.

21 MR. GARDNER: So you had reading along what we now know  
22 is the water line, anywhere between 80 and 93 percent gas?

23 MR. WALL: Um-hum.

24 MR. GARDNER: Okay. And those were sustained, correct?

25 MR. WALL: Yeah, just right in here, and it was piled

1 up. I call it piling up. If you have a line that's -- and I  
2 don't know where this water line went after the fact because the  
3 gas wasn't there. But if you dig something up and you quit  
4 digging at this point here, the gas will be free-flowing in that  
5 ditch only, and where that stops at, that easy access stops, it  
6 stops with you. It'll just hold itself right there.

7 MR. GARDNER: Had there been a lateral off that line  
8 anywhere, do you think it could have followed that, as well?

9 MR. WALL: Yes. It's going to go the least resistance.  
10 So if there had been a -- if they had put a 90 on it, you know, in  
11 the gravel bed, poured the gravel in around it, your gas is just  
12 like a roadmap. The gas is just going to chase it.

13 MR. GARDNER: Thank you.

14 BY MR. CHHATRE:

15 Q. You said the other area, the first time you put a hole  
16 you would get a high reading and then it will drop?

17 A. On all these holes here?

18 Q. Yeah.

19 A. Yes, sir.

20 Q. Is that correct?

21 A. Um-hum. You would get -- I think it's 48 percent was  
22 right in front, but we would drive the bar down, pull it out, and  
23 then our leak detector wand and stick it down the hole and watch  
24 the reading, and the reading would peak out, say, at 48 percent.  
25 Well, if you never touch it, it would go 48, 46 -- 48, 46, 45, 44,

1 and it would just do it that quick, up and out.

2 Q. Okay. My question then is: Which reading you will put  
3 in your chart?

4 A. I was told to put the peak reading. But see, that's  
5 not -- to me, that's not actually a good -- a true test, a true --  
6 to me, it's not a true reading.

7 Q. Why not?

8 A. Because it doesn't sustain.

9 Q. But the gas still exists there, right, at that level?  
10 You (indiscernible) --

11 A. If I'm getting gas right here, let's say I'm getting a  
12 reading of 60 percent gas right here, I stick that leak detector  
13 in and it runs up to 60 and it stays 60, 50, and it's fluctuating  
14 but it's going to stay in that 50 to 60 range, to me that says  
15 there's something pushing. In other words, I've still got a feed  
16 from somewhere that's pushing gas, because that little thing is a  
17 pump and it's pulling out of the ground, this draw. So if there's  
18 nothing pushing -- and that's what it was doing on every one of  
19 these bar holes. Up and just (makes sound). And so it's like you  
20 let your balloon out and just opened the balloon up and it goes  
21 (makes sound) and then there's nothing there.

22 Q. So that reading, the highest reading is part of your  
23 procedure, company procedure? That's what my --

24 A. No.

25 Q. -- where I'm driving at. If we get the readings from

1 you guys, showing this drawing with the readings, what am I to  
2 assume; is that the highest reading or a sustained reading?

3 A. We were told put the highest reading down, and to me  
4 that's -- you know, you can stick that wand in the ground and you  
5 may have a hole this deep and you may have a hole this deep, but  
6 the gas may be -- when you put that wand in the ground, it's  
7 giving you a reading. Well, the reading may have been coming from  
8 this depth. It may have been backfilled at one time and it's  
9 softer dirt. So I go with a sustained reading, what it will peak  
10 and what it will hold to.

11 See, if I'm holding gas -- and it's just like my half-  
12 moons. If I'm building gas and I'm saying, okay, I've got one  
13 sustained reading here that won't go away, then I start -- and I  
14 start going around there and I get another one and I get another  
15 one. Well, that's going to start almost telling me which way to  
16 walk. Now I'm going to keep walking back to the source, because  
17 if these aren't sustained and they drop out, this is keeping me on  
18 my path. You just keep working your way around, working your way  
19 around, go where the gas is telling you to go.

20 And then there's going to be -- see, just like this.  
21 Why was we getting all this gas here? Well, we tracked it down by  
22 doing all these little holes, and then all of a sudden -- well,  
23 there's got to be something right here because no sustained gas  
24 here, no sustained gas here, but in a little line right here you  
25 did. So we started to locating.

1                   Now why? I don't know, but it had --

2                   BY MR. NICHOLSON:

3           Q.    But you're saying it was all trapped against that water  
4 line, right?

5           A.    But it's called -- it's trapped.

6           Q.    Yeah.

7           A.    But when you put gravel in a ditch line --

8           Q.    Sure. Obviously, yeah, it's going to --

9           A.    -- the gas lays with it.

10          Q.    Right.

11          A.    It'll build and hold, especially when you get clay built  
12 around it.

13          Q.    Right.

14          A.    It just holds.

15          Q.    But everything you took on the other side of the water  
16 line towards unit 80 you had done after the crack was exposed?

17          A.    No, this was during. The first thing I did is -- well,  
18 we found this crack long after daylight. We had already been  
19 knocking some holes down.

20          Q.    Okay, so the fading that you saw was pre-exposure?

21          A.    Right. We was knocking holes. While they're working,  
22 we're checking.

23          Q.    Okay.

24          A.    And then this line right here, this is what we call  
25 the -- you could say water line, that have a sand bed in it, was

1 the only thing, to my knowledge, that was holding a gas pattern.  
2 And so, I had my vac truck come over here and vacuum -- and just  
3 put that 4-inch vacuum hose in that sand bed and just let it run.  
4 Because what it's doing is it's going to draw all that gas out of  
5 that ditch line that's caught up in that sand bed. And we --  
6 after that, all this faded out.

7 MR. GARDNER: Rob, is it fair to say -- because you're  
8 doing those readings -- while we record those readings, the  
9 readings in and of themselves still had to be interpreted along  
10 the way? You're making a judgment call; you're watching it rise  
11 and watching it drop. The fact that you wrote 93 or any number  
12 does not necessarily indicate how long it was there or the  
13 frequency, but it will say -- it's a documentation of the  
14 recording --

15 MR. WALL: I'd say --

16 MR. GARDNER: -- at that time, but would be in your  
17 judgment and your people's judgment, that still has to be -- that  
18 reading and anything you do subsequently has to be managed and you  
19 have to apply your knowledge to that. So the readings in and of  
20 themselves on a piece of paper, while they're valuable, they're  
21 not the whole story.

22 MR. WALL: No.

23 MR. GARDNER: The whole story is the narrative you've  
24 given us that what you saw, like what you witnessed after that  
25 reading, gave you -- it was a means of giving you information? Is

1     that accurate?

2                 MR. WALL:   Yes, and that's --

3                 MR. GARDNER:  To make some more decisions and so --

4                 MR. WALL:   I'll go with where I'm trying to find out  
5     what (indiscernible) if that was the case, was it from inside?  I  
6     don't know.  Was it from outside?  I'm an outside worker.  That's  
7     what I've done for 23 years.  You know, so when I'm called over  
8     there, I'm doing what I've been trained to do.  If we've got leaks  
9     on the outside, we're going to find them.  That's what I was told  
10    to do, so that's what my knowledge is telling me as I start  
11    working around.  And we've got operators that's working around  
12    there, also.

13                So it's just like a roadmap underground.  If it was a  
14    straight line of gas and a straight line of water, it would be the  
15    perfect world; it's not hard to figure out.  But when you have  
16    hidden sewers and you have hidden water -- nobody knew this water  
17    main was here.  They said the water main was out here in the  
18    street.  Is that our fault?  No.

19                BY MR. NICHOLSON:

20                Q.   Who said the water main was out in the street?

21                A.   Well, that's where the locators come across saying it --

22                Q.   Oh, okay.

23                A.   So that's where your blue marks are.  All we go by is  
24    what they're saying is there, you know.  So that's where --  
25    anytime we've worked in these areas, we learn and we have to study

1 and we have to figure out the other utilities. You know, why is  
2 this water line here? I don't know. Where is all the other sewer  
3 laterals and the sewer line mains? You can't tell that because  
4 you can't get any help. You're on your own when you get out there  
5 in this.

6           So I started building a map in my own mind of what I'm  
7 assessing, and that's what I -- why was that? That was my next  
8 question when they was fixing this and digging back, why are we  
9 getting gas up here, when there's nothing that's supposed to be up  
10 in here, you know, and it's not anywhere over here and it's not  
11 anywhere over here; why is it just here? So we dug a hole and  
12 that's how you find out. You learn. You dig and there it is.

13       Q.    Sure, yeah.

14       A.    And then there was the sand, so then we started checking  
15 into it and it was -- deviate outside of it, wouldn't hold a  
16 reading. Deviate outside of it, wouldn't hold a reading.

17       Q.    So you're showing deviate to the east, nothing.

18       A.    To the street or back to the apartment.

19       Q.    It would fade, okay.

20       A.    Nothing would ever hold with what I was doing in my  
21 building my little picture in my head.

22       Q.    Were you the only one, you and your guys, the only ones  
23 over there bar hole testing?

24       A.    No. You had -- so you had some working on the service  
25 and then you had another truck working on this right here, and you

1 had four or five different crewmen. So I would grab one or two  
2 crewmen and say, okay, let's put some holes down here. And we was  
3 told actually after we started doing this, that they wanted  
4 everything spray-painted yellow wherever we put bar holes down.  
5 So we did that; we sprayed everywhere we knocked holes in the  
6 ground.

7 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. Ravi?

8 MR. CHHATRE: Yeah, I have a question. Yeah, I'm just  
9 (indiscernible).

10 BY MR. CHHATRE:

11 Q. You said you were told to obviously put the highest  
12 reading.

13 A. Um-hum.

14 Q. Who told you that?

15 A. I don't know her name.

16 Q. Do you know her title?

17 MR. NICHOLSON: You're looking to Mike.

18 MR. WALL: I'm trying to think who. There was so many  
19 people out there scurrying around.

20 BY MS. CHHATRE:

21 Q. So there's no procedure in the company?

22 A. No, no. No, no. I was told at that end to do the  
23 highest reading, but how I made my findings --

24 Q. Was that a lady who told you that?

25 A. Yes. We was going by what --

1 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible).

2 MR. WALL: So you should have --

3 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That's the only lady I know.

4 MR. WALL: Between the Public Service Commission and  
5 everybody that was out there --

6 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: What's the lady's name that was  
7 wearing the boots?

8 MR. BELL: Angie. Angie?

9 MR. WALL: Dark head?

10 MR. BELL: Yeah.

11 MR. WALL: Okay, that's who it is.

12 MR. NICHOLSON: Who's Angie?

13 MR. BELL: Angie (indiscernible), the paralegal.

14 MR. NICHOLSON: A paralegal is telling --

15 MR. WALL: No, no. She was saying that's what they  
16 wanted to see.

17 BY MR. CHHATRE:

18 Q. She was telling you what to report?

19 A. No, no. Let's go back. She wanted to see the highest  
20 readings. So I'm not going to argue with anybody. What I'm going  
21 to do is I'm going to give them the highest readings, but I do  
22 assessing the job myself.

23 Q. So who was in charge at the scene?

24 A. I am. I was in charge. That wasn't hard to figure.  
25 But I'm just -- don't change on me of what we're doing. This

1 right here, you could tell me I want the highest readings. Why?  
2 I don't know. That's NTSB. That may be is something they're --  
3 you all want. The other was that may be something the Public  
4 Service Commission wants. I know what the gas company wants and  
5 that's what we did, and that's why we dug this hole here, that's  
6 why we put the holes back and forth here, that's why we narrowed  
7 it down in that ditch line, that's why we fixed that leak right  
8 there, and we found a leak right there, we dug that up to assure  
9 there was a leak and we dug that up to assure there wasn't a leak  
10 there. That's the gas company's policy directly, straightforward.

11 Q. Help me a little bit. I'm -- it's a long day, but -- so  
12 is there it was company procedure that every time you go and do  
13 bar hole testing, is there a manual or guideline that tells you  
14 what to report for the bar hole testing? Does it say record the  
15 highest, record the lowest? Is there some kind of documentation  
16 that guides all the -- because Angie's not there when you do all  
17 your bar hole testing.

18 A. All right, well, in my world, with our everyday  
19 maintenance -- forget this happened here. You're just saying on a  
20 standard day.

21 Q. Right. I understand.

22 A. Okay, we're going to -- we come out and somebody's  
23 smelling gas, and it's just this apartment smelled gas. We're  
24 coming out and we pull the maps and we pull the -- and we say,  
25 okay, we don't have a main here, we've got a main here, we don't

1 have anything here. And I build a roadmap what's underground and  
2 I locate services out. Our procedure is locate everything out,  
3 get Miss L out here to locate all the other utilities so we don't  
4 damage them, and then we start going from farthest end back. We  
5 check around the foundation, we check the service, we start  
6 working from inside out, because then --

7 Q. No, that part I understand.

8 A. Well, you're asking for procedure.

9 Q. No, but what I'm saying, in the procedure, what reading  
10 do you report? I mean, I understand how you go about --

11 A. Okay. I was going by my readings, nothing sustained  
12 here. That's why I'm telling you what I -- what to me, what  
13 counts. Sustained readings of 93 and 89. Sustained readings,  
14 this was blowing cool gas. This right here was bubbling.

15 Q. No, I guess, maybe I'm not making myself --

16 A. Yeah. What are you trying --

17 Q. -- maybe I'm not making myself clear. Rob, what I'm  
18 looking for, if you do the bar hole test because somebody said I  
19 smell gas.

20 A. Uh-huh.

21 Q. So you go in there, you do your bar hole test and you  
22 generate a report of some sort. I mean, there has to be  
23 documentation that --

24 A. It goes on the computer.

25 Q. Right, right, documentation. So in that documentation,

1    which numbers do you report?

2           A.    I would report what is sustained.

3           Q.    So you won't report --

4           A.    And when I fixed it, we aerate.  Say, if we fix this  
5   leak here, we would aerate the other gas -- just like we did here,  
6   we aerated it with that vac truck.  Because we're not leaving  
7   until we figure out where this is coming from or what the reasons  
8   is behind this.  You know, but it's almost like it threw you off,  
9   is why we wasn't doing our job.  I'm just doing what we're told,  
10  but I'm not deviating off of what our policy states that we do on  
11  a everyday basis.  I can add to whatever somebody wants.  Somebody  
12  can tell me paint them circles green.  Well, that's fine, but I  
13  could care less.  I'll spray them green.  It's still not changing  
14  what my thoughts are.

15          Q.    Sure.  But is that based on your experience in the  
16  past --

17          A.    Yes.

18          Q.    -- or is there some kind of a procedure that tells you  
19  to do that?  That's my question (indiscernible).

20          A.    Oh, this is 23 years on-the-job training.

21          Q.    Okay.  That's what I thought.  I just wanted to --

22          A.    And I'm your leak go-to person, if you know what that  
23  is.

24          Q.    I understand.  There is no substitute for experience,  
25  so --

1           A.    No, not at all.  When you get all these other things  
2 underground, you throw out on paper out the window.

3           Q.    Okay.  So that day you did something you normally will  
4 not do?

5           A.    No, I did everything.  Everything I'm supposed to do I  
6 did.  I just added a little bit --

7           Q.    More.

8           A.    -- to do what somebody else is telling me.  Did it  
9 change what my thought patterns were?  Not a bit.  Did it change  
10 how we fixed these leaks and so forth?  Not a bit.

11          Q.    Okay.  So let me go back to my scenario.  Let's say that  
12 I'm living in one of those buildings and I call the, I guess,  
13 home -- that association, whatever, that agency or I call -- let's  
14 say I call you guys.

15          A.    Okay, you call emergency hotline.

16          Q.    I call the 800 number saying I smell gas.  And you show  
17 up and you do a bar hole test in front of my house, and in front  
18 of my house it really doesn't sustain.  Let's just say it's 50  
19 percent and dropped down to 1 percent or zero.  So are you going  
20 to tell me that I had no gas in the ground?

21          A.    No.

22          Q.    So what is the report going to say, I guess is what I'm  
23 trying to understand?

24          A.    Okay, here we go.  I want to -- definitely want to get  
25 you comfortable with this.

1 Q. No, I'm trying to understand. It's not a matter of  
2 being comfortable. I'm just trying to understand.

3 A. No, I'm just saying I don't want you to have any doubts  
4 about the job and how we start from point A and go through our  
5 analysis.

6 Q. Right.

7 A. The house you're living in is here. Here's a road bed,  
8 here's a road right here, here's your driveway.

9 Q. Right.

10 A. Comes up. Say you've got a gas meter here and there's a  
11 house here.

12 Q. Right.

13 A. I'm going to come out. You call a gas leak, I'm coming  
14 to your door. [Knocking sound]. I'm going to knock on your door.  
15 I'm not going to ring your doorbell.

16 Q. Yes, I know about -- and that's a good practice.

17 A. Right, okay. Yes, ma'am, you've -- yes, sir, you've got  
18 a gas leak. Can you give me an idea, did you smell it the inside?  
19 Did you smell it in the morning? Did you smell it in the evening?  
20 Do you smell it now?

21 You're the one living here and smelling it. When, how,  
22 and where are you smelling it?

23 Q. Right, okay.

24 A. "Well, every time I come out here to go to my mailbox I  
25 smell it." Well, okay. I'm going to first -- we're going to come

1 out here and we're going to start soaking this meter, because when  
2 you're coming out here to walk to the mailbox, it could be venting  
3 the -- you know, it could be the simplest fix.

4           So we're locating lines. We got Miss L called. I'm  
5 locating this service out to the main line. Here's our main line  
6 and there's a water box. Well, so we're going to punch some holes  
7 down and we're going to check here, and you got the water coming  
8 into the house. Well, we know how the water lays, so we'll punch  
9 holes around the edges. We'll punch holes around the edge here,  
10 and if we're getting any gas, we chase it. So we're starting up  
11 here and we're working our way back.

12           You smell gas. So far I haven't gotten a sustained  
13 reading anywhere. Let's say I get 50 percent LEL right there,  
14 nothing up here, nothing back here. Now I'm out here in the  
15 street and I'm checking and knocking around. You smell gas. I'm  
16 getting a low reading of LEL there. It won't go away just by  
17 itself. We get a shovel off and we'll dig that service up right  
18 there. I pull the prints. It may be a insert, it might be a  
19 coupling, it could have been lightning, it could have been  
20 corrosion from when they laid it in and the rock just got a little  
21 bitty tiny speck. You don't know until you look inside and see  
22 it.

23           That's how we do everything. So we go from here back,  
24 then we'll drill the gas main out. But if that's the only thing  
25 and you smelled it and we got it -- we're not driving off and

1 going "you don't have a leak." We're going to exhaust all means.

2 Sometimes they don't have a leak and what they smelled  
3 is over here is rotting garbage or there's a dang dead dog laying  
4 over -- you don't know. But you've got to assess and you've got  
5 to make sure. I'll even go across -- if I can't see a cleanout,  
6 we look under the vents and find where that sewer's going out --  
7 say it's coming straight out -- and we'll bar hole all the way  
8 across and we'll, a lot of times, hit that sewer ditch for  
9 overkill to make sure. Because gas is sneaky and we try to --

10 Q. So, you know, you have 20, 25, 30 years experience now.  
11 What about a technician who has 5 years' experience? What numbers  
12 he or she might report?

13 A. That's -- they call me. I'm the supervisor. That's my  
14 job.

15 Q. So you tell them what to --

16 A. Yes, and that's every day. I mean, if they -- and  
17 believe me, we get calls all the time. Because I always -- this  
18 is my mentality that I've always told. When I was on a two-man  
19 truck digging and working these leaks, and my helper that I would  
20 train, you come out of this house, and I don't care if it's in  
21 that million-dollar house or that \$12,000 house, you act like it's  
22 your mother living in the house that you're working in front of.  
23 Now can you can go home and sleep at night knowing you did the  
24 thorough job? Would you leave something or would you half-way do  
25 it? Think about that being your grandparents' house. You want

1 the same treatment there. And that's how I always tell them, and  
2 all the guys know, if you have a question, you call us. That's  
3 what we do. We come out and we help.

4 Q. So all the bar hole testing that's being done at this  
5 ground zero and around, and we will get those readings on a map,  
6 what -- the readings on those maps, would they be the sustained  
7 readings or will they be the highest readings or will they be  
8 lowest readings, or what readings those will be?

9 A. Me?

10 Q. No, no, I mean the report that we are --

11 A. What -- I don't know, I don't know -- I don't -- I  
12 haven't seen them. What happened was I had a death in my family  
13 Wednesday.

14 Q. I'm sorry to hear that.

15 A. And I had to leave, and I came back last night. So I  
16 don't know what's been turned in. I've heard about prints. I  
17 haven't seen anything. You know, if you've got something for me  
18 to look at, I'll take a look, but I don't know --

19 Q. We're sorry to hear that. We are sorry that we had to  
20 get you with a death in the family. We appreciate you coming in  
21 here.

22 A. Yes. But I mean that was in -- you're saying the  
23 readings has been put on paper --

24 Q. No, what I'm really trying to understand here is if  
25 we -- once we get this report, we go back to Washington, D.C. and

1 we are looking at these different numbers, what should we  
2 interpret these numbers as? Are these numbers the highest  
3 readings, the lowest readings, or --

4 A. No, sir. You go with what I call holding gas.

5 Q. Okay. So those readings are only sustained.

6 A. That is just because if this right here -- nothing that  
7 I checked in here sustained anything other than being on or right  
8 against this very borderline. This right here was nowhere near a  
9 gas main or a gas anything. We checked this way and we check as  
10 well; aerated it out, it died. All this right here sort of fade  
11 because it was caught up in that gravel. Right here was a leak,  
12 right here was a leak. We dug a hole to -- because the roots were  
13 still holding gas. And this right here was holding and there was  
14 nothing there, either.

15 Q. So upon your arrival and when Angie told you to do the  
16 highest reading, do you at all talk to Mr. Gallagher saying I  
17 don't do this, but this is what this person wants; what do you  
18 want me to do?

19 A. If she came out and asked me what I was going to do --  
20 or you said do this for me, if it didn't break or slow my pace  
21 down of what I'm doing, I don't have a problem with that. It's  
22 not affecting my process or slowing my process down. If that's  
23 going to help you with what your findings are, that's great.

24 Q. So I guess the answer is you didn't check with  
25 Mr. Gallagher?

1           A.    Oh, I talked to him.  You know, it was just, hey, we're  
2   out here, you know, the situation; we was trying to find the  
3   unknowns and that's all I was doing.  I was doing what I was  
4   trained to do.

5           Q.    Sure.  My question is simple.  Do you talk with  
6   Mr. Gallagher that she's asking me to do this; what do you want me  
7   to do?  Did you do that or you did not do that?

8           A.    Oh, I did that, but we was -- when we got narrowed down  
9   to right here, I say it didn't change --

10          Q.    No, I know what you did.  I'm saying did you check with  
11   Mr. Gallagher --

12          A.    Oh, I talked with David.

13          Q.    No, no.  Let me -- did you talk to Mr. Gallagher and  
14   say, look, I only record sustained readings and I have been doing  
15   this for last 20 years, but this person here is asking me to  
16   record the highest readings; what do you want me to do?  Did you  
17   check that?  Because I thought he was the incident commander, kind  
18   of de facto, or -- so did you do that or you did not do that?

19               MR. GARDNER:  Ravi, are you asking Rob if he asked David  
20   what David wanted him to do --

21               MR. CHHATRE:  Give David (indiscernible) is what I'm  
22   saying?

23               MR. GARDNER:  -- when he asked -- when he was allegedly  
24   asked to record these readings by Angie, did you ask -- are you  
25   asking did Rob go to David?  I want to make sure I understand.

1           MR. CHHATRE: Yeah, that's what I'm asking. Rob told  
2 earlier that he was kind of de facto incident commander.

3           MR. GARDNER: Right.

4           MR. CHHATRE: And --

5           MR. GARDNER: So the question, I guess, would be perhaps  
6 was did you have -- is your question: Did Rob have a conversation  
7 with David --

8           MR. CHHATRE: Before he started --

9           MR. GARDNER: -- about -- before he wrote those readings  
10 down?

11           MR. CHHATRE: Yes. That's what I'm -- what I understand  
12 is he's telling me something different than he had been doing for  
13 25 years, and so I'm just asking did he check with the incident  
14 commander?

15           MR. WALL: See, to me, that's -- to me, that would be  
16 looking for David to tell him that I was going to put something  
17 that's not going to slow my progress down, not going to impede the  
18 fixing of this. To me, that's almost a moot point. Why run to  
19 David when I can make that decision on my own?

20           BY MR. CHHATRE:

21           Q. As a supervisor you'd know, right?

22           A. Right. There's no -- I mean, later on, if he asked,  
23 yeah, David, she wants me to do this. Did it get in the way of  
24 what I'm doing? No. You know, we're doing things --

25           Q. That's clear, I mean --

1           A.    Okay.

2           Q.    Would you be able to -- this (indiscernible) check with  
3 you earlier, but what is your duties? What are your duties as  
4 supervisor?

5           A.    Supervisor of leakage?

6           Q.    Yeah, one duty I got that you train people on your crew.

7           A.    Well, just --

8           Q.    That I got.

9           A.    Well, yes, I mean --

10          Q.    What other duties? As a supervisor, what are your daily  
11 duties?

12          A.    Well, let's see, I'm a -- when you get to be  
13 construction supervisor, you are -- Ms. Mary Somebody called in  
14 about a complaint in the yard. The hole in the street, so-and-so,  
15 so-and-so. They follow to a supervisor. The builder's calling  
16 and he wants this repaired, he wants this cut loose, can you -- so  
17 it's --

18          Q.    So you direct your crew to different locations, is  
19 that --

20          A.    Right. In other words, it's just -- and then we -- you  
21 know, if we can get to you, we can get to you. But leaks are  
22 what's -- leaks are number one. They're prioritized as number  
23 one, and so that's how -- a supervisor always been known as a  
24 catch-all.

25          Q.    Yes, I hear you. Now upon your arrival, did you talk to

1 Mr. Gallagher at all as to what's happened? I remember you saying  
2 that you started, you know, trying to kind of get on speed as to  
3 what's happening?

4 A. Right. When I got up there I saw David, Rob Rumph and  
5 Chris Hill. And I saw David first. David is -- he's the boss.

6 Q. Right.

7 A. And so much is going on, he's like, hey, Rob, we  
8 can't -- we're having trouble finding this gas service, which you  
9 can hear it blowing out of the ground. I said okay. So we get  
10 going over there on that. So that was -- I forget -- that crew  
11 was already working on it.

12 Q. Yeah.

13 A. His name's Dan. Very competent, very good, knows the  
14 job. Okay? He was all ready deducting what it wasn't. Because  
15 there's other lines in the ground. This line is a dead line. Who  
16 knows in god's name where it was going to. It wasn't us. It was  
17 just something. So he's deducting what is and what isn't.

18 So that's how -- you train competent people and you let  
19 them go. If they have questions, you're there, but don't  
20 concentrate on one area. We was concentrating on the whole --

21 Q. Don't interfere in what they're doing?

22 A. Right.

23 Q. Now I have another question for you that I'm trying to  
24 understand. You said something about let it blow so that you're  
25 afraid of the gas --

1           A.    Yeah, that's just from years of me, my personal thing.  
2   Gas is lighter than air.

3           Q.    Yep.

4           A.    As long as you've got it blowing and venting up and out,  
5   and it was blowing straight up and out. We had the whole area  
6   secured with the police officers, fire department, everybody.  
7   Wasn't nobody coming in there lighting cigarettes or flicking  
8   BICs. All right, so we knew the area was secure. The gas is  
9   harmless. I'd rather it blow.

10          Q.    Sure.

11          A.    Let it get up and out. Why? If you valve it off, now  
12   you've back pressured that service line, now that service is  
13   holding the main pressure. Well, we just had an explosion is what  
14   was told. I don't know what kind of shock -- I don't know what's  
15   hit the service, I don't know what shook the ground, I don't know  
16   what's going on with that service. It may be cracked underground  
17   from the shock of it. Let it blow. It should keep the pressure  
18   from back-building on it. Now the gas is up and out. The leak's  
19   not going to be underground; it's going to be blowing away. So I  
20   would rather it --

21          Q.    So what would have been a good time to cut the gas off?

22          A.    When we got daylight and was able to see and they got  
23   the fire -- you know, everything beat down and was able to go  
24   with -- we already had some holes going on.

25          Q.    Right.

1           A.    It wasn't this and it wasn't that.  In other words,  
2 everything was kind of falling in --

3           Q.    Because (indiscernible) --

4           A.    A better controlled area, right.  And then so they  
5 valved it off and then we started checking for leaks and checking,  
6 you know, more -- you know, because it was right here.  It was  
7 like it was right here.  I mean, it was in this little pocket  
8 here, so it --

9           Q.    But in the meantime, the firefighters, the rescue people  
10 cannot conduct their rescue or recovery operation, right?  That  
11 thing was still going.

12          A.    Right now they was still dealing with hotspots in here,  
13 so there wasn't any of that going on.  That was valved off,  
14 actually, and I wasn't there watching my watch at the time.

15          Q.    Right.

16          A.    But it wasn't -- it didn't blow, you know, all into the  
17 morning.  It was early on when they decided to valve it off.  
18 That's my personal belief, whenever you're -- that wasn't hurting  
19 anything, and they wasn't ready to do their assessment of walk-  
20 throughs, you know, to getting under the rubble.  They wasn't  
21 doing that yet.  There was no plans of doing that at the time.  It  
22 was actually another hour and a half after this was valved off  
23 that they started doing their -- trying to do some checks.

24          Q.    But again, what I'm asking is if you had seen it and you  
25 had not.  While the gas is still venting, blowing, whatever you

1 call it, were the firefighters and rescue workers were able to do  
2 any of their rescue and recovery operation or they were still  
3 under standby mode until this thing was --

4 A. They had -- the firemen pretty much -- the ones I talked  
5 to, they already been told that there was two unaccounted for, and  
6 they had assessed this building right here, and this right here  
7 was still too hot to go in because of the, I guess, the hotspots  
8 that was under all the debris. So this right here wasn't  
9 affecting anything yet. It wasn't slowing them down for their --

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. -- their work at the time. If that was the case, we'd  
12 have valved it off the minute they say it, we got to get inside  
13 and see what's up.

14 Q. The reason I ask is because I think earlier we were told  
15 that people were getting pressured to cut the gas off, cut the gas  
16 off.

17 A. Well, that's -- you know, we're doing what's best for  
18 safety, you know, that's the -- we don't want to cause another  
19 hazard --

20 Q. Sure.

21 A. -- so this gas -- and we, like I said, this whole area  
22 was cordoned off. This gas blowing up and out was safe, and we  
23 was on it, we was -- everybody -- all of the people that needed to  
24 be there was there. When we valved it off, that's when you could  
25 have other problems because you don't know what that explosion did

1 to that service line.

2 Q. Um-hum.

3 A. So let it blow.

4 Q. Yeah, much clearer picture now. The drawing helped, the  
5 discussion helped, so --

6 A. Yeah, I kind of beat it up, that's for sure.

7 Q. Yeah. I have no more questions for you.

8 MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. Willie?

9 MR. WILLIAMS: I have no questions.

10 MR. NICHOLSON: Bob?

11 MR. GARDNER: None at this time.

12 BY MR. NICHOLSON:

13 Q. I've got a question for you. I want to go back because  
14 something you said made me think about this. You noticed the  
15 bubbles after that riser had been valved off; is that correct?

16 A. After it got daylight.

17 Q. Okay, well, when it was daylight --

18 A. And when they --

19 Q. -- was that valve shut, the riser valve?

20 A. That's a good question. I'm trying to think about --  
21 because the first bubble that was seen was over here. Yeah, right  
22 along here. I don't think that was -- see, this was seen -- this  
23 was cut off not long into the morning. It was still early. See,  
24 my time frames are all screwed up on that.

25 Q. That's fine.

1           A.    But this right here, when this bubble was seen, they had  
2 backed the water off because there was so much water --

3           Q.    Yeah.

4           A.    -- that you couldn't tell, and if you want to find a  
5 leak, that's another thing.

6           Q.    Well, you mentioned back-pressure and I --

7           A.    Well --

8           Q.    -- was wondering if they shut the valve, put back-  
9 pressure on that main and then --

10          A.    No, see, that's -- the main's going to stay the same.  
11 It's going to be -- the only back-pressure is going to get right  
12 here on the service.

13          Q.    But the static will go up when you take the velocity off  
14 of the service line, right, on the main? Pressure will rise on  
15 the main when you take that flow off the riser?

16          A.    Well, see, that's just like everything. You'll have a  
17 sustained because everybody, everything -- everybody in this  
18 community, because that's some kind of pilot --

19          Q.    That was up in the atmosphere. I mean, it's more than a  
20 pilot, isn't it? But --

21          A.    Well --

22          Q.    The flow was substantial, though.

23          A.    If you get 50 furnaces going around here --

24          Q.    Okay. So in your experience, you don't -- you think the  
25 bubbles would appear whether you had backed off --

1           A.    Right.  Oh, yeah, most definitely.

2           Q.    -- that riser valve or not?

3           A.    Yeah.

4           Q.    Okay.

5           A.    And they was just -- this right here was -- that crack  
6 was running this roots and running the ditch line.  And was it  
7 doing any of this spreading?  No.  It was running this little  
8 ditch.

9           Q.    And then just based on your experience, when you -- it  
10 sounds like gas was maybe trapped along that water line?

11          A.    Um-hum.

12          Q.    Because you said there were like static readings.  You'd  
13 take the reading and it's sustained.

14          A.    Um-hum.

15          Q.    But I'm wondering as you got in the field to the west --

16          A.    Got away from the --

17          Q.    Yeah, and you said they dissipated?

18          A.    They would -- you would get a reading, it would just --

19          Q.    And drop.

20          A.    It would fall out to --

21          Q.    Would that be the same if the gas had a migration path  
22 to an area of lower resistance and it's flowing to that, would you  
23 also get that dissipation?  You know, if it's moving away from  
24 where you're testing --

25          A.    That's -- see, that's another thing I'm looking for.

1 When all these holes right here -- somewhere there's a sewer line  
2 that's tied -- attached to this apartment somewhere. I -- you  
3 know, maybe it was coming off this way or -- I don't know. But  
4 what I'm doing is after we started getting gas, I'm looking  
5 potholes or bar hole testing to see if I can get something. If,  
6 just like here, I did earlier --

7 Q. Um-hum.

8 A. -- if I'm coming through here and then goes up 38 and  
9 drops out, this one goes up 42 and drops out, just anything, but  
10 it's just up and down --

11 Q. Yeah.

12 A. -- and it goes to just nothing. Then all of a sudden I  
13 get here and it goes 48 and goes to 40 and it sits there and it  
14 does this. Okay?

15 Q. Yeah.

16 A. Now let's put another hole semi-close. Let's start  
17 half-mooning around this hole and find out why. Is this just a  
18 fluke or what's the reason? Is there a ditch line? Is there a --  
19 anything? Because it's going to sustain just like this.

20 Q. So even if it's moving to an area of --

21 A. I'm going to chase this --

22 Q. -- least resistance, you'll see it? It will be  
23 sustained --

24 A. Yeah, you're going to chase it and I'm going to --

25 Q. Okay.

1           A.    -- and I'm going to bar hole around it to see which way  
2 that least resistance is showing.

3           Q.    Okay.

4           A.    If it's hard-packed dirt over here, it's going to go up  
5 and fall out. If it's soft-packed dirt here, which is telling  
6 me -- if I'm getting 40 here and it's holding, 36, 37, 34, and I  
7 put another one here, uh-oh, this runs up to 40, but it's holding  
8 32, 33. All right, I'm on some pattern. I'm trying to find  
9 patterns.

10          Q.    Okay.

11          A.    And then the pattern is -- I'm going to chase that  
12 pattern and it may take me straight out.

13          Q.    Okay.

14          A.    Well, then I'm going to turn around and start working my  
15 way back once I find a pattern. Well, then I'm going to have to  
16 come dig a hole right here and see what it is to break that  
17 pattern. So there may be a sewer right here coming across in  
18 this.

19          Q.    Right. So if there --

20          A.    I'm going to find it.

21          Q.    -- if there is a sewer there coming across and that gas  
22 is rushing to another place, you'll still see it as a sustained  
23 reading?

24          A.    Um-hum.

25          Q.    It won't just drop off because it's rushing?

1           A.    Right.

2           Q.    Okay.

3           A.    That ditch line is going to be full.

4           Q.    Okay.

5           A.    That ditch line will -- because it sponges.  Once you --

6           Q.    It just can't get out that quick.

7           A.    Right.

8           Q.    Okay.

9           A.    And it's going to be in that ditch.

10          Q.    Okay.

11          A.    It will deviate somewhat, but it's not going to fight  
12 its way to go into a hard pack when it can just sit there and ease  
13 along through that softer.

14          Q.    Okay.

15          Q.    So when you start finding a ditch, you start building  
16 another little -- you just start running highways because it's  
17 like a underground maze.

18          Q.    And then at the risk of beating this to death, I just  
19 want to go back because I wasn't quite sure.  This Angie -- Angie  
20 asked you to take down readings, like physically write them down  
21 or --

22          A.    She was on the highest readings.

23          Q.    But you were writing those down for her, or she was  
24 following you writing them?

25          A.    No.  That's -- well, I hate to say this.  This --

1 Q. You were recording --

2 A. I was recording -- I was telling -- I was circling off  
3 theories on what it punched when that was the case --

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. -- and we had a phone -- a notepad.

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. So I was writing down in a little red ink. That's why I  
8 was wondering if it would -- if it's in this evidence room  
9 somewhere.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. Because when we was doing that, my truck was parked way  
12 up here, locked up. And we took lunch here, and I had that big  
13 pad and I didn't have anywhere to put it. I put it on that light  
14 trailer and it disappeared. My pad disappeared for this one.

15 MR. CHHATRE: Your pad disappeared?

16 MR. WALL: Sir?

17 MR. CHHATRE: Your pad disappeared?

18 MR. WALL: Yes. And I was hoping that Robert or  
19 somebody at the gas company had got it because everybody was right  
20 in here, because I went to looking for it and I haven't found it  
21 since. And then I left out on Wednesday morning to go to the  
22 family --

23 MR. NICHOLSON: Sure.

24 MR. WALL: -- emergency, and then, I've been trying to  
25 tie up loose ends last night and today. And there may be that pad

1     some -- well, if -- I don't know.  Somebody could have it here.  I  
2     don't know.

3                 MR. CHHATRE:  Do you believe the note pad --

4                 MR. GARDNER:  I don't know anything about it, but I'll  
5     ask our people and see.

6                 MR. WALL:  And it's in red ink and it's one page.  And I  
7     had written, I had written, but to me -- I can tell you there  
8     were -- was sustains here.  I can tell you exact readings here.  
9     Why?  Because that's what I'm looking for.  All those little  
10    readings there that went up and fell out to nothing --

11                MR. NICHOLSON:  Yeah.  No, that's --

12                MR. WALL:  -- well, to me, that's nothing to -- there's  
13    nothing to look for.

14                MR. NICHOLSON:  Does Angie work for Alabama Gas or --  
15    I'm looking to Mike again.  No?

16                MR. BELL:  No, I'm just trying to -- I don't know --

17                MR. NICHOLSON:  I don't know anything about Angie --

18                MR. BELL:  It doesn't make any sense to me, so I can't  
19    put this together right now.

20                MR. NICHOLSON:  Okay.

21                MR. BELL:  I can't figure out --

22                MR. NICHOLSON:  But you don't normally have paralegals  
23    out on leak surveys?

24                MR. CHHATRE:  Did you guys ask Angie to do any testing  
25    that she keeps?

1 MR. GARDNER: There's no chance of that.

2 MR. BELL: No, I can tell you that I didn't. Now, I  
3 mean, I don't see --

4 MR. CHHATRE: Do you know if Mr. Gallagher asked her to  
5 do that? Do we know -- we were talking here when --

6 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah, we can ask him.

7 MR. CHHATRE: Yeah, I know. I mean --

8 MR. BELL: David would be the best one to ask, honestly,  
9 because he was on scene. But I'm not aware of anybody requesting  
10 us -- excuse me, of us requesting her to do something specific  
11 with any --

12 MR. WALL: Here's where I think it -- I hate to say --  
13 let's go off the record for a second. This is my --

14 MR. NICHOLSON: Yeah. All right. Fine. Are we  
15 finished with -- maybe we can just end it. Are we done?

16 MR. CHHATRE: I have no --

17 MR. JONES: I have one quick thing.

18 MR. NICHOLSON: Let's finish this.

19 BY MR. JONES:

20 Q. One quick thing. This is Wallace for the record.

21 When you were getting your readings, were you able to  
22 get in this area in front of these buildings at all?

23 A. We were -- with all the -- with the -- see, this was  
24 under water. All that right there was standing water and the  
25 service --

1           Q.   For about how far out from the building, just rough  
2 estimate?

3           A.   Within about -- well, we had three different potholes  
4 they had before I got there. The backhoe had been looking for  
5 this service and they had two or three, you know, holes, probably  
6 4 to 6-foot deep, like right in here. Like one was up here, right  
7 here at the service. One or two was like caddy corner of each  
8 other, because we wound up almost digging in when we started  
9 stripping this main, that hole here. So all this was actually dug  
10 out pretty -- 75 percent was dug. So there was --

11          Q.   Yeah.

12          A.   -- no readings there. But it was all under water. And  
13 there again, if there's a leak, it had been going t-t-t-t-t-t-t-t.

14          Q.   Okay.

15          A.   You would have seen some bubbles.

16          Q.   But also with the water, you couldn't put any bar holes  
17 down through here?

18          A.   Right, so we cut this --

19          Q.   Okay.

20          A.   -- and we was checking here and we checked around --

21          Q.   But if there had been something coming off the side of  
22 this going in front of this building right here, you couldn't have  
23 checked it because of the --

24          A.   At the moment. But when we found this, that -- there  
25 was -- it went up here and T'd, dead-ended, T'd, dead-ended.

1           Q.    Okay, what I'm getting at, if there had been a water  
2 coming off this, going this direction --

3           A.    There was a water valve about right here --

4           Q.    Okay.

5           A.    -- and we checked all around it.

6           Q.    Okay. Did you find anything there?

7           A.    And it went up and fell out --

8           Q.    Okay.

9           A.    -- because it was a water -- a valve box under there --

10          Q.    Um-hum.

11          A.    -- and it had the little offset nut on it --

12          Q.    Okay.

13          A.    -- and we checked in a cycle all around it. But right  
14 here, you know, because all that was dug out and saturated. Okay.

15               MR. NICHOLSON: And just for the record, Rob's pointing  
16 to the north side of Unit 80. So you're saying water was --

17               MR. JONES: Yeah.

18               MR. NICHOLSON: -- on that side?

19               MR. JONES: Water was between 80 and this -- and the  
20 court.

21               MR. WALL: And we stripped all this out right here on  
22 the main line.

23               MR. JONES: Okay.

24               MR. WALL: But anything you got going back, anything off  
25 of that water that was found up here, it was -- it went up and

1 fall out and nothing sustained.

2 MR. JONES: Okay.

3 BY MR. CHHATRE:

4 Q. Just a last question, with your -- all your experience,  
5 is this common practice in the industry-wide, and this is only if  
6 you know, are there other people with different utilities doing  
7 bar hole testing who need to record the sustained readings? I  
8 don't do bar testings, so I mean, I'm just trying to understand,  
9 you know --

10 A. See, I don't know what other companies, what their  
11 procedures are --

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. -- but sustained readings is a better --

14 Q. Well, I'm not questioning your logic. I'm saying -- I'm  
15 trying to understand, is -- the reason for that is we investigate  
16 accidents and if tomorrow we have -- this never really occurred in  
17 my mind until you mentioned that, that you are reporting the  
18 sustained readings.

19 A. Um-hum.

20 Q. So we want to be better informed about it. So I'm just  
21 saying, is there authorization and association --

22 MR. NICHOLSON: Or, yeah, is there a standard?

23 BY MR. CHHATRE:

24 Q. Are you guys kind of huddle and discuss each others'  
25 experience and come up with the best practice? And so I guess my

1 question, really, is it, to your knowledge, is that a standard  
2 industry practice, understood, official, or that you're aware  
3 or --

4 A. To turn to a page and say article 6, document, what --

5 Q. No, no, association like NACE.

6 A. I don't know.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. I know that we -- our policies and procedures of how  
9 we --

10 Q. I understand.

11 A. -- were trained.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. But the high-low readings --

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. -- you know, the ones that fall out --

16 Q. Yeah, but this is interesting part of it. Next time I  
17 go around, I'll ask. But it will (indiscernible). Thanks for  
18 that.

19 A. It almost -- I'm overstating, maybe. If you get all  
20 these little readings and they fade away, that's one test. It  
21 would be like chasing phantoms. You've got to get to that  
22 sustained area and it will start telling you where it's start  
23 going. It will guide you to run that absolutely --

24 Q. Right.

25 A. -- to the place you need to be.

1           MR. CHHATRE: That's it. Thank you much.

2           MR. NICHOLSON: Okay.

3           MR. CHHATRE: -- I really, I really appreciate you  
4 spending your time --

5           MR. NICHOLSON: Okay. We'll conclude the interview.

6           (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:           ALABAMA GAS CORPORATION (ALAGASCO)  
                                  NATURAL GAS RELEASE WITH IGNITION  
                                  BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA  
                                  DECEMBER 17, 2013  
                                  Interview of Robert Wall

DOCKET NUMBER:           DCA-14-MP-001

PLACE:                    Birmingham, Alabama

DATE:                     December 21, 2013

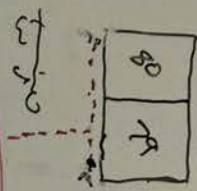
was held according to the record, and that this is the original,  
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed  
to the best of my skill and ability.

---

Angie Duray  
Transcriber

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XTERR



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GEORGE ROAD



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JOPPA

