

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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MERRIMACK VALLEY RESIDENTIAL GAS

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FIRES AND EXPLOSIONS

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Accident No.: PLD18MR003

SEPTEMBER 13, 2018

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Interview of: ERICH SCHLITT

Northern Essex Community College
Lawrence, Massachusetts

Saturday,
September 16, 2018

APPEARANCES:

ROGER EVANS, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

RICHARD WALLACE, Director, Pipeline Safety Division
Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities,

DAVID NELSON, Operations Manager
Columbia Gas

THOMAS TOBIN, Esq.
Wilson Elser Law Firm
(On behalf of Mr. Schlitt)

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I N T E R V I E W

(11:00 a.m.)

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3 MR. EVANS: We are on the record with Erich Schlitt. Good
4 morning today is September 16, 2018. It is now 11 a.m. in the
5 morning. We are at the Essex Community College in Lawrence, MASS.
6 This interview is being conducted as part of the investigation
7 into the South Lawrence accident that occurred on September 13th.
8 The case number for is PLD18MR003.

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

13 And by the way my name is Roger Evans and I'm the
14 investigator in charge of this particular case for the National
15 Transportation and Safety Board out of Washington, D.C.

16 Mr. Schlitt you're permitted to have one other person present
17 during the interviews. This is a person of your choice.
18 Supervisor, friend, family member or nobody at all.

19 Please state for the record the spelling of your name and who
20 you have chosen to represent you today,

21 MR. SCHLITT: E-R-I-C-H last name is Schlitt, S-C-H-L-I-T-T.
22 Representing me today is THOMAS TOBIN, an attorney with Wilson
23 Elser Shaw Law Firm

24 MR. EVANS: And MR. TOBIN can you please spell your name?

25 MR. TOBIN: My name is THOMAS TOBIN, T-O-B-I-N. And I am an

1 attorney with the Wilson Elser Law Firm.

2 MR. EVANS: Thank now I'd like to go around the room and have
3 each person introduce themselves with their name and affiliation
4 of their company or agency.

5 MR. WALLACE: Richard Wallace, Director of the Pipeline 60
6 Division, Massachusetts Department of Public Utility.

7 MR. NELSON: David Nelson, Columbia Gas, Operations Manager.

8 INTERVIEW OF ERICH SCHLITTER

9 BY MR. EVANS:

10 Q. Okay thank you. Well thank you again for appearing today,
11 appreciate it. We're just going to start out with some basic
12 questions, how long you've been with the firm, if you've started
13 in one department and change and got promoted to this or whatever.

14 We'd like to that you kind of trail of positions you've held.

15 A. Okay.

16 Q. And we'd like to know your educational background as well.
17 So if you can kind of go through that --

18 A. Sure.

19 Q. -- we'll start with that.

20 A. So I have an Engineering Degree from -- do you want me to
21 name the school?

22 Q. Just what your major is.

23 A. Okay. Petroleum and Natural Gas Engineering Degree. That
24 was a 2005 graduation date. Do you want to know about past work
25 history?

1 Q. Yes.

2 A. After graduating from college I worked in the oil field,
3 working on drilling rigs in Southern California mostly. But other
4 locations also as a (measurement) small drilling engineer.

5 I came back to Massachusetts where I'm from and worked a High
6 Period Water Company as technical engineer. And then in 2009 I
7 hired with Columbia Gas as a Engineering Specialist -- Engineering
8 Tech.

9 So after becoming an engineering tech I was promoted to a
10 position of Field Engineer. And I was a Field Engineer in
11 Lawrence until 2012. October -- it was October 2012 or November
12 became the construction leader with Columbia Gas in the Lawrence
13 territory.

14 Q. Okay I just get you -- you started as an engineering tech
15 when you came back from the water, what year was that please?

16 A. That would be 09 I started.

17 Q. Okay. Okay and in your present duties, can you tell us how
18 many reports you have?

19 A. Today I only have one direct report.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. Like, my current job.

22 Q. And the person you report to?

23 A. TIMOTHY LEARY he's the manager of construction.

24 Q. TIMOTHY O'LEARY?

25 A. LEARY.

1 Q. LEARY. And he's manager of construction for Columbia Gas?

2 Q. Yes.

3 Q. Excuse me. Okay can you describe your --

4 A. That's --

5 Q. Go ahead.

6 A. So one more work history detail is that in February of 2018 I
7 took the position of Leader Operations Support Specialist at
8 Columbia Gas. Supporting construction manager and territories in
9 Brockton, Springfield and Lawrence.

10 Q. Okay. 2018. Okay great. So if you can describe your -- for
11 us your current position like a daily routine what you would do,
12 what type of tasks you do.

13 A. In this, in the current position I'm in, I'm responsible for
14 tracking budgetary numbers for like an operations and maintenance
15 budget. I might be asked to produce reports on the capital spend
16 or the status of our capital program. I'm sometimes given
17 assignments having to do with reporting on the status of our
18 safety program.

19 From time to time just general initiatives that kind of
20 overlap between engineering and construction at times. General
21 managerial support delegated, a lot of manager type initiatives we
22 could move to made to execute those.

23 Q. Okay. Were you aware of this particular project? Did you --
24 were you controlling numbers for this project for the
25 neighborhood?

1 A. No I was not tracking the budget or progress of this
2 property.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. In 2018.

5 Q. Okay. Can you describe any involvement you have with this
6 project that -- as far as this accident?

7 A. So my involvement with this project was related to the
8 installation of main in 2016.

9 Q. Okay. And what was that part? What was your duties there?

10 A. So as a construction leader I have several direct reports, we
11 call them construction coordinators. I have other reports other
12 than that but, construction coordinators are field employees that
13 monitor the construction activities on a daily basis.

14 Ensure that the work is being done safely to our guest -- to
15 our standards and they're also producing payment to our
16 contractors for the work that's been performed based on a contract
17 we help those contractors.

18 Q. What kind of oversight do these -- like if they're -- if they
19 have a standard in their hand and they're looking at what's going
20 and they're kind of like QC in a way? They're looking at how the
21 works going in? Is it going in per the drawings and all the
22 standards and all that type of thing right?

23 A. Right.

24 Q. Who oversees that? I mean, who oversees what they're
25 overseeing?

1 A. Who's overseeing the inspectors?

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. I -- could you clarify that?

4 Q. Well is there a QC department that goes along and says okay
5 we're going to watch what our inspectors are doing. Make sure
6 they're doing this right. Is that an activity that you --

7 A. Okay. So from time to time I would do field visits and do
8 checks with the crew on what's going on. I might be able to
9 provide support with how the product is going. I would check in
10 with the inspector on site.

11 Make sure that he has all the information he needs and that
12 any questions that he might have I can go between engineering and
13 construction and get the information as need in the field.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. In addition we do have -- in addition we have a group of, let
16 me just think of the term, we have a group of pipeline safety
17 people that will visit job sites also, and perform oversight on
18 contractors to ensure that they are following the gas standard and
19 doing the right things on site.

20 Q. And those are calling the employees?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Pipeline safety. Okay. Is that a department?

23 MR. NELSON: Yes.

24 Q. Still exists?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. In your role as a construction coordinator did you have stop
2 work authority?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Do you hear people that reported to you at that time they
5 have as well?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. And do the pipeline safety people have stop work authority?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Okay. During this installation of the main did you have --
10 can you recall any infractions you had or any times you wrote
11 people up or people were written up or stop work was required or
12 things didn't go right?

13 A. Not that I recall.

14 MR. EVANS: That's all I have for right now.

15 MR. WALLACE: Richard Wallace speaking.

16 BY MR. WALLACE:

17 Q. Erich you mentioned that you were involved in the
18 installation of the new main on this project that was involved in
19 this incident?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. What size that main?

22 A. The main trunk line 8-inch high density plastic. And there
23 was stubs installed off of that main into side streets. They
24 might vary in size to the stub I suppose.

25 Q. Were you on the project when they did the tie over from high

1 pressure to high pressure?

2 A. Could you clarify what time you're talking about?

3 Q. At any point in time. When they did the tie overs and when
4 you installed a new main, at some point in time you have to tie
5 that main over.

6 If it's going to be a high pressure main or a low pressure
7 main, you have tie --

8 A. Yeah this is not -- yeah. This was not a high-pressure job
9 because --

10 Q. Was it a low pressure?

11 A. -- the low pressure (indiscernible) pressure.

12 Q. So was it low to low?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Okay. When you were at -- were you there at anytime when the
15 main was being tied over?

16 A. It was one tie in when I was a construction leader. And it
17 was a 6" Mueller flanged T tap hooked up. And I was not on site
18 during that operation.

19 MR. WALLACE: Okay thank you.

20 BY MR. EVANS:

21 Q. You mentioned that there's a pipeline safety department
22 within Columbia Gas?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Who heads up that department?

25 A. At the time, I don't know the gentleman's name. Today it's

1 CJ (INSTEAD).

2 Q. Could you spell that?

3 A. C -- his name is Curtis Anstead, A-N-S-T-E-A-D.

4 Q. Do you know how many employees the -- Curtis has working for
5 him?

6 A. Currently or at the time of the install?

7 Q. Both.

8 A. In Massachusetts or for all of NiSource?

9 Q. In Massachusetts.

10 A. In Massachusetts? There might 2-3 people in that department.

11 Q. Do you know how if -- do you have any knowledge of whether
12 they visited this particular installation?

13 A. I don't have that knowledge.

14 MR. TOBIN: Just for the record, this is Tom Tobin. You're
15 talking about 2016 when he was involved in the installation?

16 MR. EVANS: Yes.

17 MR. TOBIN: Okay.

18 MR. EVANS: Thank you.

19 BY MR. EVANS:

20 Q. Do you have any knowledge as to the training these
21 individuals have?

22 A. I don't.

23 MR. EVANS: Thank you that's all I have.

24 MR. NELSON: Dan Cote was in charge of pipeline safety at the
25 time of 2016.

1 MR. EVANS: Thank you.

2 MR. NELSON: I just wanted to answer your question.

3 MR. EVANS: And can you spell the name please? This Is Roger
4 Evans.

5 MR. NELSON: D-A-N, C-O-T-E, is the last name.

6 MR. EVANS: Thank you.

7 MR. NELSON: And Erich, does every employee CMA employee have
8 the stop work authority?

9 MR. SCHLITT: Yes they do.

10 MR. NELSON: That's all I have.

11 MR. EVANS: This is Roger Evans, back to the pipeline safety
12 that -- kind of an interesting twist that we heard for the first
13 time today actually. Would we be able to get reports of what they
14 picked up on if they were out there in 2016 and they -- is that
15 part of what they do they publish -- they write reports and
16 publish those reports for management and all that?

17 MR. NELSON: Yes.

18 MR. EVANS: What would those reports be called? If you know.

19 MR. SCHLITT: We typically would call them an I-Auditor Field
20 Audit. It's a system.

21 MR. EVANS: I-Auditor Field Audit. Okay. That's all I have.
22 You're good?

23 MR. WALLACE: Yes. Richard Wallace. Yes, I'm all set.
24 Thank you.

25 MR. EVANS: Okay. Thank you very much. We appreciate the

1 time and thank you for coming in today.

2 MR. SCHLITT: Okay.

3 MR. EVANS: It was nice meeting you. Be safe.

4 MR. WALLACE: Thank you, Erich.

5 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

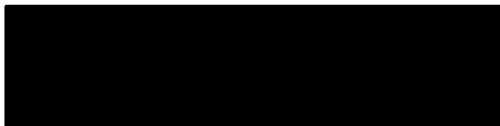
IN THE MATTER OF: MERRIMACK VALLEY RESIDENTIAL GAS
 FIRES AND EXPLOSIONS
 SEPTEMBER 13, 2018
 Interview of Erich Schlitt

ACCIDENT NUMBER: PLD18MR003

PLACE: Lawrence, Massachusetts

DATE: September 14, 2018

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.

A large black rectangular redaction box covers the signature area. Below the box, the name "Cheryl Peratroun" is partially visible in blue ink.

Cheryl Peratroun