UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *
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MERRIMACK VALLEY RESIDENTIAL GAS *
FIRES AND EXPLOSIONS * Accident No.: PLD18MR003
SEPTEMBER 13, 2018 *
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Interview of: DANA ARGO

Northern Essex Community College
Lawrence, MA

Tuesday,
September 18, 2018

APPEARANCES:

ROGER EVANS, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

RACHAEL GUNARATNAM, Pipeline Incident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

JAMES SOUTHWORTH, Investigator
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DARREN LEMMERMAN, Investigator
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JULIE HALLIDAY, Senior Accident Investigator
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Columbia Gas

THOMAS TOBIN, Esq.
Wilson Elser Law Firm

I N D E X

I N tee E R V I E W

(9:55 a.m.)

MR. EVANS: We are on the record with Dana C. Argo. Good morning, today is September 18th, and it is now 9:55 a.m.

My name is Roger Evans. I m an investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board out of Washington, D.C. We re at the Northern Essex Community College in Lawrence, Massachusetts.

This interview is being conducted as part of the investigations in multi-resident gas explosions that occurred in Lawrence and Andover, MA on September 13th. The Case No. for this investigation is PLD18MR003.

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

Mr. Argo, you are permitted to have one other person present during the interview. This person of your choice can be supervisor, friend, family member, nobody at all? Please state for the record the spelling of your name and who you have chosen to be present during this interview.

MR. ARGO: Dana Argo, D-A-N-A, A-R-G-O, and I ve chosen Tom Tobin.

MR. EVANS: And Mr. Tobin, can you please introduce yourself?

MR. TOBIN: My name is Tom Tobin. I m an attorney with the

Wilson Elser law firm.

MR. EVANS: I m going to go around the room now starting with my left to let everyone in this room introduce themselves with their name, spelling of their name, and their affiliation and job title.

MR. WALLACE: Richard, R-I-C-H-A-R-D, Wallace, W-A-L-L-A-C-E, I m director of the Pipeline Safety Division with the Department of Public Utilities in Massachusetts.

MS. GUNARATNAM: Rachael Gunaratnam, R-A-C-H-A-E-L G-U-N-A-R-A-T-N-A-M, HAZMAT investigator with the NTSB.

MR. LEMMERMAN: Darren, D-A-R-R-E-N, Lemmerman, L-E-M-M-E-R-M-A-N, PHMSA accident investigator on the Operations Team.

MR. SOUTHWORTH: Jim Southworth, J-I-M, S-O-U-T-H-W-O-R-T-H, I m an investigator with the Rail, Pipeline, Hazardous Materials Division of the NTSB out of Washington, D.C.

MS. MOTLEY: Angela Motley with the Department of Public Utilities, A-N-G-E-L-A, M-O-T-L-E-Y.

MS. HALLIDAY: Julie, J-U-L-I-E, Halliday, H-A-L-L-I-D-A-Y, I m a senior accident investigator with the USDOT Office of Pipeline Safety.

MS. DOIRON: Sheila Doiron, S-H-E-I-L-A, D-O-I-R-O-N, I m with Columbia Gas.

MR. NELSON: David Nelson, D-A-V-I-D, N-E-L-S-O-N, Columbia Gas operations manager.

MR. EVANS: Thank you, Dana, for agreeing to talk to us

today.

INTERVIEW OF DANA C. ARGO

BY MR. EVANS:

Q. We d like to start out and give us your job title and how long you ve been with the firm. And if you have progressing responsibilities through the years, if you can kind of give us, perhaps, the last 10 years or so, unless you ve been in this position for 10 years.

A. I m an operation center manager for Columbia Gas. I ve been with Columbia Gas for 17 years. The last 10 years I ve had two positions. I was a systems operation manager overseeing pressure regulation, LNG and LPG activities, and then moving into the operations center manager role.

Q. Okay, and what is your education background, sir?

A. I have degrees in, BA degrees in psychology and English from the University of New Hampshire.

Q. Okay. Thank you very much. Can you describe for us your organization? How many reports do you have?

A. Direct reports I have six.

Q. What are the titles of those direct reports and the names?

A. Field operations leaders, I have David DiFrancesco.

Q. And can you spell those names if you know how to spell them?

A. D-A-V-I-D, D-I, capital F, R-A-N-C-E-S-C-O. Robert McCabe, R-O-B-E-R-T, M-C, capital C, A-B-E. Christopher Campo, C-H-R-I-S-T-O-P-H-E-R, C-A-M-P-O. Stephen McGinnity, S-T-E-P-H-E-N, M-C,

capital G, I-N-N-I-T-Y.

Let s see where I m at. Ryan DeCoste, R-Y-A-N, D-E, capital C, O-S-T-E. Amy Apkarian, she s actually an operations specialist, senior operations specialist, A-M-Y, A-P-K-A-R-I-A-N. I actually didn t count my assistant, Melanie Young, M-E-L-A-N-I-E.

Q. That s okay. So as your role as a systems ops manager, excuse me, op center manager and you have these reports, can you describe the duties of what your reports are doing for you on a daily basis? Just a typical one?

A. Okay, David DiFrancesco, he handles our pipefitters, they handle meter sets, large, for the most part, well not most part, they handle large and residential meter sets. He also has control of our locators who locate pipeline for us based on one-call tickets.

Q. Okay. And the next guy, Roger McCabe, just curious.

A. Robert McCabe --

Q. Robert.

A. -- he handles our Plant Group street crews.

Q. Okay.

A. Where when we re out performing maintenance on our system, repairing leaks, abandoning services, installing services at times.

Q. Chris Campo?

A. Chris Campo handles our Meter Group, where we do as we call

them PTs, periodic meter changes. We handle inside pipe surveys, customer complaints, odors, odor complaints, PRs as we call them.

Q. Right, okay, and Stephen McGinnity?

A. Stephen McGinnity is new to the role as of Monday, actually. So he handles LNG and LPG operations.

Q. Okay, and Robert DeCoste? Ryan.

A. Ryan DeCoste, he also handles Plant Operations repairing leaks, abandoning services, installing services.

Q. Okay. Really, the reason to ask this is in case we come back for additional interviews we may want to dig deeper into this and then we can request them by name.

So on any given day, in your world, I would imagine you deal with all these tasks that you ve just lined out here. All these reports: leaks, locates, meters, all that stuff. That s all under your control. Correct?

A. Yes.

Q And was there any of these individuals that you mentioned that have been intimately involved with this incident or is all?

A. Not all. Intimately involved in this incident would be Dave DiFrancesco --

Q. Okay.

A. -- Chris Campo --

Q. Okay.

A. -- Robert McCabe.

Q. Yup, okay. So as far as on the ops side, do you get into any

of the design, how things are risk assessed, do you get into any of that at all?

A. Risk assessment?

Q. Yes, risk assessments and how, if you re going to put in a new regulator what you may be looking at if you re going to purchase new regulators. You know, do you get into that part of it?

A. Yes, I m part of a Gas Standards Group that like a subject matter --

Q. Expert, like an SME.

A. -- SME, SMR.

Q. Okay, okay. So the design that we have of regulators, and I know this is a large area, it s a tightly packed community that runs for miles and thousands and thousands of people. Was the system that you have in place, in this neighborhood where the fires occurred, or in the neighborhoods where the fire occurred, is that common throughout?

Do you have high-pressure systems as well, I haven t talked to anybody about that yet but do you have high and both low in this area?

A. Yes.

Q. So you have like the 60 lbs. with the flow devices on the branch going to the service connections and all that with modern hardware and stuff, I would imagine? Meters and regulators.

A. Residential regulators.

Q. Residential regulators.
A. Commercial and industrial regulators, yes.
Q. One of the questions I had that I just needed to ask for someone in D.C. Can you put a percentage on how much of your system is actually the low pressure? Any idea?
A. No, I wouldn t feel comfortable rendering a percentage on it. I mean we have quite a bit of our system that s low pressure but percentage-wise I wouldn t --
Q. I mean in gross terms, over 50 percent? Less than 25 percent? Numbers like that can we get from you, or you still wouldn t feel comfortable?
A. I wouldn t feel comfortable. I never thought of it as a percentage so I really wouldn t know.
Q. Okay, okay. Getting back down to, you know, this accident and what happened here. And we in the Ops Group have been through this countless hours ourselves with the help of, you know, your people as well and I think we have a really good understanding of what happened.

We have one of the best regulator people, probably, in the country with us, Gregg Oakes from PHMSA. He s their subject matter expert, and I haven t debriefed him, but I would like to hear, you know, what he has to say. He s only been here, what, 2 days?

So what we re trying to find out is the way this was set up and the way that the regulations are written, you know, for

overpressure protection and all that. Can you describe for us the philosophy you have with regard to how overpressure protection is configured for this system?

A. How it is configured for this system, to be honest with you I m not sure if changes have been made since I was overseeing pressure control. We re a matrix organization so there s a different silo, so to speak, that covers pressure control. I can tell you how we did it when I was in Systems Ops, but not presently.

Q. How many years ago would that be?

A. I left that organization to take this position in January of 2014.

Q. Okay, yeah, that s recent. So, yeah, go ahead and describe for us what your understanding of what the system was when you worked in that department.

A. As far as the control --

Q. Yes.

A. -- and how we, normal configurations would consist of a monitor or, you know, upstream overpressure protection with a downstream, of course, it s different terminology, control or worker-type regulator with a wide-open monitor configuration.

Q. So the worker with a monitor, that s the standard --

A. Correct.

Q. -- in the system?

A. Correct.

Q. Would you say that at the time that every configuration within your system had something like that?
A. I can it was the standard, I wouldn t say that all of them were, but it was the standard. If there were maybe for capacity reasons or whatever other reason that might of occurred we could have adjusted the configuration, but that was the standard.
Q. So is it fair to say that we would find something like that all over the area, I mean, in a lot of neighborhoods in this area and in Andover and all that?
A. Again, unless they ve been changed since I had that role, yes.
Q. Okay, okay. You know, just maybe for the benefit of some who may not know about this in this room, I don t know, but, you know, in my past I ve done a lot of risk analysis. And it s kind of like you have an idiot light in your car, and you say to yourself, "What happens if this light goes on in my car and I don t respond to it?"

You know, what s the likelihood of that light going on? What s the consequences if I don t respond to it equals the risk. So when you had this configuration that you were talking about with the monitor and the worker regulation, regulator format did you go through a full-blown risk assessment with perhaps what if questions?

Or some sort of a hazard analysis with a piece of software or any kind of, you know, was that a group discussion or

did you get something like that from the manufacturer? Was there anything at all in there about, you know, what the risk was if you lost sensing lines?

A. I can tell you that there was, I mean, always discussing, you know, where sensing lines should be and things like that as far as risk. But I don t if that answers it or not as far as where they should be, you know, set up in the system, the configuration of them, the location of them.

Q. Well, I guess, let me ask a different question before we go into that. Do you see this accident as being the loss of the line more the issue than the sensing line? The loss of the line, you know, they cut into the line, and now you have the sensing line reading that it needs more gas and opening wide open on the regulator causing the high pressure.

Was that kind of scenario ever looked at, you know, as a risk item? I mean, did you look at that as part of the risk in your evaluation or how using the regulators like this and how you have them configured and all that?

MR. TOBIN: Just so I understand what you re asking, if this witness did or if the company did?

MR. EVANS: The company if that s --

MR. ARGO: I m not sure if they ve actually looked at it in that respect.

BY MR. EVANS:

Q. Can you tell me, I know, your OPTIMAIN, do you use OPTIMAIN?

Is that part of your work?
A. I believe it s OPTIMAIN, yes.
Q. Yeah, do you currently use the risk assessment feature that s built into that with your work?
A. I don t know enough about OPTIMAIN to tell you exactly how it s used. I hear the term from our Engineering Group that they re using it for, you know, determining replacement and things like that, but I don t know enough about it.
Q. Okay. From the standpoint of this accident and your own personal thoughts when this happened, and you ve been here quite a while, just did you have an idea in your mind what may have happened when you heard there were multiple homes exploding and there was gas smells all through neighbors? What ran through your mind?
A. Initially?
Q. Yes.
A. Well, initially, I was heading to a construction area where I had heard a bypass had come off, I ll say, aggressively off when it was being disconnected, and it was a low-pressure system. So that s when I responded, I got the call from Rob McCabe that told me that very thing, and I said, you know, I was on my way.
So that s why I went out, so I won t kid you, initial thoughts were we were at a construction site with a bypass so that s what I was running through my head. What was bypassed? So I was not thinking regulation, I was thinking the construction

site.
Q. I see. Are you aware that the construction packages that are provided for, you know, the crews that did the work that day that they don t include a review of the sensing lines, what the impact of a sensing line may have on a project?
A. I was not aware of that.
Q. Had you ever heard in the past that that had been the procedure in earlier days?
A. I m not aware of that.
Q. The one thing that we re wondering about is, you know, sometimes, especially in this era, there s a lot of change in people. People move, people get new jobs, and all that type of thing. People get promotions, they get promoted out of this, and they go to that. And we were wondering if perhaps, this was the way it was supposed to be before but suddenly that s no longer done.

I mean, had you ever heard of it in the past though, that when a work package is put together that someone from, you know, someone with a know of regulators would review that package, you know, before it hit the street with the approval to proceed kind of stamp on it?
A. I m aware that our engineering group designs and reviews them, and that leaders for those projects review them.
Q. Okay. I think that s all I have for right now.

MR. WALLACE: Richard Wallace speaking.

BY MR. WALLACE:

Q. Dana, you indicated that David DiFrancesco, Robert McCabe, and Christopher Campo had responded to the location or were they just involved in the incident in some fashion?

A. Initially, Rob McCabe and Dave DiFrancesco responded to the same area that I was at that time point, that construction site.

Q. Were you and the other two individuals there when the failure was in progress?

A. Yes, during the event, yes.

Q. Did you notice any unusual sounds coming from the trench?

A. No.

Q. Did either of other two individuals make any comment to that?

A. I m not aware of those comments, no. Any comments like that, no.

Q. That s all I have. Thank you.

MS. GUNARATNAM: So, Roger, (indiscernible) in the circle? Okay.

MR. EVANS: Introduce --

MS. GUNARATNAM: Sorry?

MR. EVANS: Introduce yourself.

MS. GUNARATNAM: Oh, sorry, Rachael from NTSB.

BY MS. GUNARATNAM:

Q. Dana, I had a question about, you said you were on the way to a construction on September 13?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. What was the site address?
A. It was the intersection of Salem Street and South Union Street in Lawrence.
Q. Okay, and what kind of work was going on?
A. There was a tie-in being performed. Infrastructure replacement, new pipe to existing pipe.
Q. So when Rob called you, what did he tell you?
A. He explained to me that the construction crew, there was one of the workers that was removing the bypass and that it blew off abruptly and I ll say at a greater force than was expected considering the pressure that they were working with.
Q. And so --
A. And that he thought there was an overpressure situation going on.
Q. Okay. So take us through what you decided after that.
A. Well, so the timeline of what I did at that point?
Q. Yes.
A. I called my boss, who was on a flight, but I left him a message that I was responding to a site. This is what I thought I had and that, you know, I d get back to him as soon as I could because I was going to be on a worksite and I don t bring my phone when go out to a worksite, I leave it in my vehicle. So I would get back to him when I could.
And then I drove out there; I was receiving different calls. I received a call from Gas Control telling me that they had seen a

spike in pressure. And when I responded to the site, I met up with Rob and asked him what he had seen, and at this point, he said they were seeing some higher pressures.

I believe they were seeing in the 2-lb range in that area. And at that point, you know, he continued his investigation, we had technicians evacuating homes.

Q. Who directed the technicians?

A. The technicians, I m not sure who directed, when I arrived at the scene the technicians were already evacuating homes.

Q. Go ahead.

A. And at that point, you know, Rob and I conferred, and he stated that he believed we had an overpressure and that he was going to check with Engineering on what it would take to isolate the system. Not to implement it but what it would take, he had Engineering start checking value stations and what it would take to shut this area down.

I conferred with our manager of Engineering, Dave Mueller, and told him what I thought we should do. And my recommendation was that we isolate the system and start blowing it down. And pretty quickly after that Engineering came through and stated there were 14 points that needed to be isolated to take the system down.

So I directed the, well, directed Rob and Rob directed the construction crew to start blowing down. They had taps there, and they put stack on the tap to start blowing down. And at that

point, they continued to evacuate.

Fire personnel were in the area; they were assisting. There were police in the area assisting with evacuation. I did have some communication with my boss, he was asking me what was going on in the area, and I told him what I thought I had.

And was then informed, initially I was told we were about 8,000 customers in that system. And did some additional consultation with our manager of engineering, and I told him, I said, I think we got to take the system down now. And we began to shut down while we were blowing, continuing to blow it down.

Q. Okay. Do you make phone calls -- like during the incident, were you calling the fire department or --

A. I was not calling the fire department, that had already been done, and they were pretty prevalent in the area.

Q. Okay. So I just wanted ask when you re looking at your systems, do you do any kind of worst-case scenario-type planning, like looking at, kind of an emergency response planning-type aspect to your systems like if this happens, like an overpressure event, you need to, you know, take these kind of steps. Is there any kind of plan like that?

A. We have an emergency response plan which we review on an annual basis.

Q. And does it include an overpressurization event?

A. I believe it does, yes.

Q. Okay.

A. I m fairly certain it does.
Q. Have you done that training? Is there a training on it?
A. I do not do the training; it s a review.
Q. Okay.
A. That is done in conjunction with our Compliance Group.
Q. Compliance Group, okay. And so what part do you do with regard to emergency response when there s a need for it?
A. What parts do I?
Q. Yeah.
A. Well, normally, in an emergency I designate an incident commander as far as the company is concerned.
Q. And did you do that here for --
A. I did, I named Robert McCabe as the incident commander.
Q. Okay. So what is the incident commander supposed to do in that case?
A. All decisions, any actions that are taken go through the incident commander. He s also conferring with emergency responders, police, fire, during that time.
Q. Okay. In this event, what if he s not, with things happening so rapidly, is there any kind of backup for him?
A. I was his backup.
Q. You were his backup. Okay. So as part of your, do you do any kind of drills or anything to kind of? Okay. Do you guys go through worst-case scenario?
A. We do, our Compliance Group on an annual basis does like mock

drills.
Q. Okay.
A. And they include emergency responders with them.
Q. Okay. So when an event like this, where your system, you know there was an overpressurization, would that have been a scenario identified in your --
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. So do you know, what are the procedures for an overpressurization event? What gets activated right away and then steps taken?
A. As far as the procedure, I mean we have procedures, but I don t think I could off the top of my head tell you what they are.
Q. Okay. All right.
A. But I have access to them.
Q. Okay. Okay, I m done.
MR. LEMMERMAN: Darren Lemmerman.
BY MR. LEMMERMAN:
Q. I m going to kind of go back into your timeline when you arrived on the scene. So when you arrived on the scene, you looked in the hole, what did you see in the hole as far as what was attached or operating or was engaged, stuff like that? Tell us what you saw at that time.
A. I saw newly installed, you know, plastic poly pipe. It appeared to be a 45 configuration, tie-in to existing cast iron.
Q. Was the plastic bypass still contacted or was that removed

from the hole at that point?
A. That was removed.
Q. Was there any gas blowing in the hole or was everything capped when you got there?
A. Everything was capped.
Q. Were there any gauges connected to the piping?
A. No.
Q. Did you direct any work to the crew to do any work at the time you were there?
A. It was, I ll say it was a collaborative effort with Rob McCabe on installing a, well, on venting and a stack was installed to vent.
Q. Did you have them install any gauges to it at the same time or was that part of the stack?
A. There was a tee in the gauge, in the stack, I m sorry, where a gauge was installed.
Q. Do you remember what pressure the gauge read when it was --
A. I do not.
Q. -- prior to relieving pressure?
A. I do not.
Q. How long did you ask them to vent once it was installed, you opened up the vent stack, how long did that vent for, approximately?
A. I m not certain. There was a lot going on there.
Q. I understand that time was kind of weird, but are we talking

5 minutes, an hour, just --
A. I would say five through an hour, it was closer to an hour, for sure.
Q. At any point during the venting process did you get pressures off the gauge?
A. I did not, but I know Rob was.
Q. Rob was reading those pressures?
A. Yes. And there was a contractor in the hole, I ll say, feeding him those pressures. He was asking for them, and the contractor was feeding them.
Q. What made the decision to stop venting? At one point, I m assuming the venting was turned off.
(Audio recording stopped.)
(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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| IN THE MATTER OF: | MERRIMACK VALLEY RESIDENTIAL GAS FIRES AND EXPLOSIONS<br>SEPTEMBER 13, 2018<br>Interview of Dana Argo |
| ACCIDENT NUMBER: | PLD18MR003 |
| PLACE: | Lawrence, MA |
| DATE: | September 18, 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.