

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

\* \* \* \* \*

Investigation of:

\*

\*

MERRIMACK VALLEY RESIDENTIAL GAS

\*

FIRES AND EXPLOSIONS

\*

Accident No.: PLD18MR003

SEPTEMBER 13, 2018

\*

\*

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: MATTHEW MENDES

Northern Essex Community College  
Lawrence, Massachusetts

Monday,  
September 17, 2018

## APPEARANCES:

ROGER EVANS, Investigator in Charge  
National Transportation Safety Board

JAMES SOUTHWORTH, Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

DARREN LEMMERMAN, Investigator  
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration  
(PHMSA)

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

DAVID NELSON, Operations Manager  
Columbia Gas

EOIN BEIRNE, Esq.  
Mintz Levin Law Firm  
(On behalf of Mr. Mendes)

| <u>ITEM</u>                  | <u>I N D E X</u> | <u>PAGE</u> |
|------------------------------|------------------|-------------|
| Interview of Matthew Mendes: |                  |             |
| By Mr. Evans                 |                  | 5           |
| By Mr. Wallace               |                  | 17          |
| By Mr. Nelson                |                  | 21          |
| By Mr. Lemmerman             |                  | 22          |
| By Mr. Evans                 |                  | 27          |
| By Mr. Nelson                |                  | 28          |

I N T E R V I E W

(10:42 a.m.)

1  
2  
3 MR. EVANS: We are on the record with Matthew Mendes. Good  
4 morning. Today is September 17th. It is now 10:42 a.m. My name  
5 is Roger Evans and I am the investigator with the National  
6 Transportation Safety Board in Washington, D.C. We are at the  
7 Essex Community College in Lawrence, Mass.

8 The reason for this interview is talking about the South  
9 Lawrence multi-residential explosion that occurred on September  
10 13th. This case number is PLD18MR003.

11 This interview is being transcribed -- excuse me -- is being  
12 recorded and may be transcribed at a later date. A copy of the  
13 transcript will be provided to the interviewee prior to being  
14 entered into the public docket.

15 Mr. Mendes, you are permitted to have one other person  
16 present during the interview. This is a person of your choice --  
17 a supervisor, friend, family member or nobody at all.

18 Please state the spelling of your name and who you have  
19 chosen to represent you today.

20 MR. MENDES: Matthew Mendes, M-A-T-T-H-E-W, M-E-N-D-E-S, and  
21 here with me is Eoin.

22 MR. EVANS: Okay, Eoin. And can you please introduce your  
23 affiliation and your spelling of your name?

24 MR. BEIRNE: Eoin Beirne, Mince Levin Law Firm in Boston, for  
25 Mr. Mendes, E-O-I-N, B-E-I-R-N-E.

1 MR. EVANS: Thank you. We would now like to go around the  
2 room and have each of the participants give the spelling of their  
3 name and their affiliation and -- starting to my left.

4 MR. WALLACE: Richard, R-I-C-H-A-R-D, Wallace, W-A-L-L-A-C-E,  
5 I'm the Director of the Pipeline Safety Division for the  
6 Department of Public Utilities in Massachusetts.

7 MR. NELSON: David Nelson, D-A-V-I-D, N-E-L-S-O-N, Columbia  
8 Gas, Operations Manager.

9 MR. LEMMERMAN: Darren, D-A-R-R-E-N, Lemmerman, L-E-M-M-E-R-  
10 M-A-N, PHMSA AID, Accident Investigation Division.

11 MR. EVANS: And for the transcriber, there's a person that's  
12 not in the room, James Southworth, J-A-M-E-S, Southworth, S-O-U-T-  
13 H-W-O-R-T-H. He is out of the room. He will be joining us  
14 momentarily.

15 INTERVIEW OF MATTHEW MENDES

16 BY MR. EVANS:

17 Q. Okay. Again, thank you for coming today, appreciate that.  
18 This is important stuff that we're, you know, trying to find out  
19 about and we're just trying to get some simple details sorted out  
20 and it's probably going to be a brief interview actually, so, it  
21 won't be too bad.

22 So, Matthew, let's just, let's begin by just telling us a  
23 little bit about your background, and how long you've been at this  
24 company, and what you do for them, what your job title is, all  
25 that type of stuff? Let's start with that.

1 A. My background is before I came here, was classic car  
2 restoration. I've been with the company for 1 year, two seasons,  
3 because of when I started. My job is I'm a laborer. Job title  
4 with who I work with is lead laborer.

5 Q. And the company name that you work for?

6 A. Feeney Brothers.

7 Q. And can you please spell that?

8 A. F-E-E-N-E-Y, B-R-O-T-H-E-R-S.

9 Q. Okay. And you say you've been there about a year, which is,  
10 you say two seasons --?

11 A. Two seasons because of when I started.

12 Q. Okay. Okay. And, lead laborer is, is there such a thing as  
13 a laborer and a lead laborer and a senior laborer or is it just,  
14 is there a pecking order for all this, or not?

15 A. I think it's, I don't know.

16 Q. Oh, okay. That's okay. And, what do you, what are your  
17 tasks that you normally do?

18 A. On a day to day?

19 Q. Yes.

20 A. Start just by setting signs up, going over, you know, our  
21 briefing. I don't really know what else, because every day it's  
22 different, and I don't, you know, I don't just do the same thing  
23 every day.

24 Q. But do you work on gas restorations primarily, or do you  
25 work, do you work down in the pit?

1 A. We do the tie-ins.

2 Q. Okay, but are you actually involved with, you know, valves  
3 and fittings and all that type of thing?

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. Okay. And, have you had OQ training since you started with  
6 this company?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Do you recall, perhaps you could tell us some of the OQs that  
9 you've had?

10 A. Dealing with specialized equipment, a lot of the, all the  
11 hands on that we need.

12 Q. Anything else you can think of?

13 A. AOCs, there's more, but I can't think of them.

14 Q. What about confined space entry? Any sort of thing like  
15 that? Safety related type things?

16 A. I mean, we go over safety every day. I don't think there's  
17 an OC for that, I mean a OQ for that.

18 Q. Okay. So, let's, let's start at the -- well first off, on  
19 the day of this incident, what was your role? What were you doing  
20 that, this day?

21 A. We were tying in the plastic to the cast iron.

22 Q. Okay. And this is a photograph of that, and for the  
23 transcriber, I'm looking at a photograph of the excavation where  
24 all the tie-ins were occurring. On the, were you down in this pit  
25 yourself here, actually doing work? And turning wrenches?

1 Installing the gauges and -

2 A. Everything from step by step, from step one to the finish  
3 step.

4 Q. Okay. Have you had any tie fitting training in the past?

5 A. No, just working with Feeney.

6 Q. Okay. How about any, any plumber work, like household  
7 plumbing or anything like that?

8 A. Nope.

9 Q. Okay. How about anything to do with electrical contracting  
10 work? Anything like, you ever done anything like that?

11 A. Nope.

12 Q. Okay. Have you been to a trade school at all?

13 A. Just for automotive.

14 Q. Okay. When you said you worked for that custom car place,  
15 what was your specialty there?

16 A. Just getting it ready for body work.

17 Q. So, not mechanical, electrical, or any of that stuff.

18 A. No. That was dealt for somebody else.

19 Q. Okay. Okay, so I'd like you to just kind of, let me describe  
20 it this way, if I were writing a story and I wanted to do an essay  
21 on what you did that day and you wanted to include all the  
22 timelines, all the times, what you heard, who you talked to, who  
23 you were with, so that when I was finished, I could, you know, I'd  
24 read the essay and; Wow, I know what you were doing that day. To  
25 the best of your recall, can you kind of, just kind of, go through



1 all the details, who you talked to, who you worked with, you know,  
2 what time you heard something, what time you saw something, what  
3 time you smelled something? Can you start with the when you  
4 arrived at the scene and pulled the metal and the metal was pulled  
5 away from the excavation? Can you start right there?

6 A. Which metal being pulled would you like?

7 Q. The --

8 A. Like the piece I got cut out?

9 Q. No, the cover.

10 A. Oh, the plates. Okay.

11 Q. The plates.

12 A. Well we set up our signs. Had our meeting, tailgate meeting.

13 Q. Excuse me. Can you give me any, any sort of time whenever  
14 you're making these statements?

15 A. I don't know what time we pulled the plates. I arrived at,  
16 you know, 6:50 in the morning.

17 Q. 6-5-0?

18 A. Yep.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. I don't keep time, I guess, I don't. I wouldn't know when we  
21 pulled the plates.

22 Q. Okay. So the plates are away from the pit, and now you're  
23 here. What did you do next and at approximately what time?

24 A. Well, once the plates are pulled, we got in the hole. We set  
25 up our gauges. We tapped one side of the by-pass, purged out the

1 other side, and then once that was purged, we set up all the  
2 saddles for the valves, pressure tested our tools, you know, in  
3 the saddles, make sure that we didn't have any leaks, and then we  
4 begin to drill and tap. Once it's been drilled and tapped, we set  
5 up our bags. Got our bags, you know, ready. We already knew the  
6 procedure, step by step, on which bags to drop first, second,  
7 third, fourth. At that, I still don't know what time it is. I'm  
8 not allowed to have a phone on me when I'm in the hole. Once the  
9 bags are set up, we had our three gauges set, they all read the  
10 nine and a half. They all read the same, nothing different. Can  
11 I see that?

12 MR. EVANS: Sure.

13 A. So, once we got our saddles on and everything's been drilled  
14 and tapped, we set up our bags. We dropped one bag first and  
15 watched our gauges for about fifteen minutes to make sure that  
16 there was no change in pressure. And then, after our fifteen  
17 minutes is passed, we jump to our second bag, drop that one. Also  
18 check the gauges some more to make sure that we didn't have any  
19 drop in pressure in either side. Then from there, we dropped our  
20 third and fourth bags. We did same amount of time, fifteen  
21 minutes. From there we open the vents, made sure that we had a  
22 good stop, which we did. And then we proceeded to cut out the old  
23 section. Once the old, once the old section was cut out, we  
24 capped off one side and, of the cast iron, and then we cut off the  
25 end of the plastic to dry fit, got our measurement, installed the

1 plastic, put it together, electrofused it, waited, because we have,  
2 you know, times that we have to wait, and then, once that was  
3 connected and time's been, you know, you waited your time, and we  
4 proceeded to finish with the plastic to cast iron connection.  
5 Once that was connected, torqued down to spec, we proceeded to  
6 take the saddles and bags out of the side we capped and then once  
7 we did that, I mean, once we pulled the bags, we soaped up  
8 everything, made sure nothing was leaking, that way we had a good  
9 seal, we had a good seal, we finished breaking that side down. On  
10 the side that we tied into, once we were tied in, we vented it  
11 out, purged out the system, made sure that it was good to go, and  
12 then we deflated the bags, but didn't pull anything off, soap  
13 tested everything, made sure that we had no leaks, which we did  
14 not, and then we proceeded to pull the bags and put our plugs in  
15 place. Once we did that, we began to break the rest of it down.  
16 We shut the valves on the by-pass, pulled out the by-pass, pulled  
17 our gauges, and then once I pulled the last gauge, we were still  
18 good with numbers for pressure, and then when I open-, after I  
19 pulled the gauge, and I proceeded about 5 minutes from the time I  
20 pulled the gauge to the time I was pulling the Tee off the main  
21 for the by-pass, is when things went sideways.

22 Q. And describe sideways.

23 A. Unexpected, you know, we go from a low pressure to high  
24 pressure coming through.

25 Q. And, do you happen to know what that pressure was?

1 A. I don't. I didn't read the gauge.

2 Q. Um-hum.

3 A. I was just standing there to keep the, down until someone  
4 could get me something to put on top of it to stop gas flow so I  
5 could get out of the hole.

6 Q. Okay. Just so we know for the record, it, as far as this,  
7 this crew you had that day, you had yourself, and we know there  
8 was a person by the name of Jose --

9 A. Yep.

10 Q. -- and we know, you know, by the book Billy was there.  
11 Right?

12 A. Oh yeah, definitely by the book.

13 Q. Right. So, we have those, now we have three people that we  
14 know of that were there. Who else was there at day besides those  
15 three?

16 A. We have Tony, who's our truck driver.

17 Q. Okay. And who else?

18 A. Earlier in the morning, we had our operator, but he left to  
19 take care of some family things.

20 Q. Okay. And what's his name?

21 A. Jason, I don't know his last name.

22 Q. Okay. Did Jason do the, took, took the cover away?

23 A. Yeah, that's all he did.

24 Q. That's all he did? Okay, great. Okay, so just for a  
25 reference, the, when you did the, the fusion, right? Any idea

1 what time that might have been?

2 A. I don't know the times. I wouldn't know what time we did  
3 this, or this, or even when we pulled the plates.

4 Q. Well how about the wait time? Do you know how many minutes  
5 that was?

6 A. That told us finish twenty minutes for cool down time or  
7 clamp time, so we left it for a little over that. We actually  
8 left it for a half hour.

9 Q. Okay. Do you have an OQ for plastic pipe?

10 A. Yeah. I believe so.

11 Q. Okay. So when, when this, I mean you say went sideways,  
12 which I like that term, it's about, it's about as good as it gets  
13 actually. So it went sideways on you. Who was around the scene  
14 at that time?

15 A. Everybody.

16 Q. So the four other people.

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. Truck driver --

19 A. Truck driver, Billy, Jose, Rich Bedard, and then once  
20 everything went, is when phone calls started going out to try to  
21 figure out what's going on.

22 Q. Okay. And whenever this occurred, were there sounds, other  
23 outside sounds, besides, you know, you know the, what was in the  
24 excavation area. Did you hear anything else?

25 A. Not in the hole, no. But outside there was houses that were

1 that had sirens from the fire trucks, so like that.

2 Q. Um-hum. Do you recall if the, if the fire trucks were heard  
3 before it went sideways, or after it went sideways?

4 A. Before there was firetrucks and ambulances and police cars  
5 that happened before we finished, you know, what we were doing.

6 Q. So was that less than an hour before you finished, or maybe  
7 less than half hour before you finished? Any recall to that?

8 A. Less than an hour, I know that.

9 Q. Less than an hour before you finished you heard fire trucks?  
10 Okay. And did you hear fire trucks kind of like from multiple  
11 directions?

12 A. The first one that went, went a opposite direction. They  
13 weren't coming anywhere hear us.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. And then, after them, it was once this went sideways, is when  
16 they were going everywhere, every which way around lines you could  
17 possibly get off.

18 Q. Okay. Did you notice anything on the horizon?

19 A. No, I didn't notice anything.

20 Q. Did you not see smoke or anything from --

21 A. Not at first. I heard the officer that we had as a detail  
22 say that there was fires and then we noticed that it was coming  
23 out of the chimneys.

24 Q. And did you notice several of those?

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. I mean like less than 10?

2 A. I noticed three.

3 Q. Okay. Okay. And, once, once this went sideways, what  
4 happened then in the excavation area?

5 A. Well once I got the gas to stop coming out of the main, which  
6 we used the section of the by-pass that has a valve to it, once we  
7 put that on there with the valve shut, we were like; Okay, you  
8 know, so we got the gas to stop there, and then it was get out of  
9 the hole and wait for further commands.

10 Q. Okay. So, when you're in the hole and you put the, the valve  
11 and the by-pass and all that, did you, any sense of time as far  
12 as, I mean, it was at a high pressure coming out, screaming out,  
13 you could hear it, I guess, correct?

14 A. Yeah, any change, the change in pitch and flow.

15 Q. Okay, so it was a decreasing pitch?

16 A. It was a roaring pitch. It was --

17 Q. A roaring pitch that was going --

18 A. Out of it.

19 Q. Coming out, was it, was the roar subsiding though after a bit  
20 of time?

21 A. Later on in the day is when it subsided.

22 Q. Okay. So if we were to say, you know, from the time that it  
23 went sideways to the time that it subsided, any idea in, you know,  
24 is that less than 3 hours? Less than twenty minutes? Is it less  
25 than 4 hours? Any, any idea at all?

1 A. I'd say, less than four, I guess, I don't, I was just running  
2 around --

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. -- doing what I was told.

5 Q. And I can tell you from our work, when things like this  
6 happen, time frames go crazy, so --

7 A. Yeah, we just --

8 Q. -- but less than four is, that's good that you have that  
9 number. That's okay. You say less than 4 hours. Probably more  
10 than an hour though?

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. Okay. Between one and 4 hours, something like that. And  
13 then once that subsided, were you told of any sort of pressures  
14 along the way? Did you hear any numbers repeated from anybody?

15 A. I didn't hear any numbers. I just know that I was told that  
16 it's good to put a plug in it after it subsided, once it got back  
17 down to where it should have been, or less than where it was. We  
18 were able to plug it back up.

19 Q. Um-hum. Did you feel that was safe to put the plug in? I  
20 mean, was it, did you feel that was a little risky to put a plug  
21 in this as this time?

22 A. I was nervous as hell to get in there because once you deal  
23 with it, you know what I mean, you don't want to deal with it  
24 again.

25 Q. Right.



1 A. So, but it was less than what it normally is.

2 Q. Okay. Well it's only human to be, I mean, I can't imagine  
3 what that would be like.

4 A. Yeah, it's not fun.

5 Q. Yeah. Okay, that's all I have for right now.

6 BY MR. WALLACE:

7 Q. Richard Wallace speaking. I have a few questions. The by-  
8 pass, when you heard the sirens, was that in the open position?

9 A. I don't know. I'm just trying to think of where I was at  
10 that time and what part of it I was doing.

11 Q. What particular tasks for this by-pass did you perform?

12 A. The whole thing.

13 Q. When you say the whole thing, could you describe that for me?

14 A. Installed it. Tapped it. Put it all together. I did every  
15 step to that by-pass, from beginning to end.

16 Q. Have you had training on doing this?

17 A. Installing a by-pass for every, every tie-in that we do, the  
18 procedure will have us install one.

19 Q. I guess what I'm asking is, has Feeney Brothers ever did any  
20 hands-on formal training to show you how to do a by-pass set up?

21 A. No.

22 Q. Do you have qualifications to do this particular work?

23 A. To do the work, yes. For the whole thing, or the by-pass?

24 Q. For the whole thing.

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. You said you were doing tapping, --

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. -- you were setting it up.

4 A. I have the qualifications for the specialized equipment that  
5 we're using, and everything we did in the hole.

6 Q. For the, for the equipment, but --

7 A. Correct.

8 Q. -- right? I guess what I'm looking for is that, at any point  
9 in time, did you get any training where you set up a mock by-pass  
10 system? Like you go through the whole procedure in a training  
11 session of how to go about this?

12 A. Only when Billy walked me step by step through it, was when I  
13 first learned. They don't do any of that in the training.

14 Q. So there's no, there's no classroom training for you?

15 A. Not for by-pass, no.

16 Q. Okay. Not for by-pass, okay. Did you take any tests under,  
17 you're qualified under NGA, Northeast Gas Association's OQ  
18 program?

19 A. Yep.

20 Q. Did you take any particular tests for doing a by-pass --

21 A. Not that I recall.

22 Q. -- in a tap, in a tie over?

23 A. The tapping and the stopping with the specialized equipment,  
24 yes. The tie-in piece, no, except the creating the piece that you  
25 are installing and the couplings that you use.

1 Q. Okay. Do you recall, did you take any breaks in the morning?

2 A. Yeah, we take a coffee break every morning.

3 Q. Do you remember about what time that was?

4 A. Yeah, the -- went and got coffee at 9 o'clock.

5 Q. Had any of the by-pass and tie-over work been completed at  
6 that time?

7 A. The by-pass piece was, was put in place and then tapped and  
8 purged before I had my coffee.

9 Q. Was it active?

10 A. Yes, gauges were reading nine and a half on both sides.

11 Q. Okay. So continue on with that. So you had a coffee break  
12 and at that time the by-pass was in process, it was working, --

13 A. Yep.

14 Q. -- did you, had you done any of the tie-over at that time?

15 A. Nope. I took my coffee break first and then we proceeded to  
16 put our equipment onto the pipe to get it ready for the next step.

17 Q. Which would be?

18 A. Well once the equipment's up there, is when we put all our  
19 bags in in a specific order, you know, we have a protocol that  
20 tells us, or a procedure that tells us what goes first, step by  
21 step.

22 Q. So you had done that particular process.

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Did you have a lunch period during that day?

25 A. We usually take one around twelve o'clock. Ours was a little

1 bit later. We took our break when the electrofusion coupling was  
2 cooling down.

3 Q. Okay. When you, when you made your tie-over, and you opened  
4 the valve, did you open the valve for the --

5 A. I did not open the valve.

6 Q. Who opened the valve?

7 A. I don't know.

8 Q. Did you hear any unusual noises in the excavation? Were you  
9 in the excavation at the time? And if so --

10 A. When --

11 Q. -- did you hear any unusual noise?

12 A. I didn't hear any, anything out of the ordinary. I was in  
13 the hole because someone opened the valve and then I soap test  
14 everything to make sure that we don't have any leaks.

15 Q. Were you the individual who broke down the by-pass?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. Did you look at the gauges at that time?

18 A. Yes, and they still read nine and a half.

19 Q. Still read nine and a half. Okay. Were there any gauges on  
20 this set up when you made the last tie-in over for the new main to  
21 the old main?

22 A. Yes. The last, the two gauges on the cast iron were still in  
23 place until the by-pass. Once the by-pass valves were shut and  
24 the by-pass taken out, the 2-inch plastic was taken out of the  
25 hole, is when I took the gauges out.

1 Q. And when you took the by-pass out of the hole, did you take  
2 the fits off of the main at that time?

3 A. I was beginning to on the side that went sideways.

4 Q. Alright. Thank you. That's all I have.

5 BY MR. NELSON:

6 Q. Dave Nelson. So when you say sideways, when you removed the  
7 fitting from the by-pass from the main, what happened?

8 A. Well, I took the gauge out and I cold put the plug on by  
9 hand, and then when I took the, the fitting out of the main, that  
10 was originally holding the by-pass, as I was unscrewing it and I  
11 got towards the top, is when the pressure changed because it came  
12 out of my hand and we couldn't get a plug onto it.

13 Q. So a couple minutes prior that you said that the gauge stayed  
14 when you removed the by-pass.

15 A. The 2-inch plastic piece.

16 Q. So, --

17 A. The Tees were still there.

18 Q. In what position was the valve at that time?

19 A. It was closed so I could get the plastic out.

20 Q. And then once they were closed, you did what?

21 A. Once they were closed --

22 Q. -- and separated.

23 A. -- and separated, is when I proceeded to take out the gauges.

24 Q. Okay. Who fused the electrofuse coupling?

25 A. I did.

1 Q. And did you mark the main with the time at which you did  
2 that?

3 A. Yes, it should be on the coupling.

4 Q. I'm good for now.

5 BY MR. LEMMERMAN:

6 Q. Darren Lemmerman. I'm just going to probably ask the same  
7 questions that these guys have asked, a little bit, but I wanted  
8 to horn in just on a little bit more detail. You had talked about  
9 on a tie-in side you purged it and then you deflected the bags and  
10 found no leaks and you soaped everything up, right? Is that?

11 A. On which part?

12 Q. It would be on the by-pass part. Not the capped end. So I'm  
13 at the bags three and four, when you deployed the bags three and  
14 four.

15 A. Well, no, because three is on the side that we capped and  
16 four is on this side.

17 Q. Okay, oh, yeah, so --

18 A. So you have bag one is right behind the cap.

19 Q. This is one?

20 A. And then that one was two, three and then four.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. According to procedure.

23 Q. One, two, bag three -- this would be two, and four, right?

24 A. Um hmm.

25 Q. So when you deflated bags two and four, did you hear sirens

1 or any noise going on, or --

2 A. Not at that time, no.

3 Q. Okay. So that's what I was trying to get the siren timeline.  
4 Then you shut the by-passes off, right?

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. After you deflated these two bags you turned the by-pass  
7 valves off?

8 A. Once we pulled the bag, we didn't pull the bags all the way  
9 out, we just deflated them so the gas could flow through. I soap  
10 tested everything. Everything was holding. We didn't have any  
11 leaks. And then, once we did that, is when we pulled the top  
12 sections out, so we could put the plugs in. There's a tool that  
13 inserts plugs.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. And then once the plugs were in, we take that tool off, you  
16 soap up your plug, make sure you're not leaking. We were not  
17 leaking at that time. And we proceeded to our next step.

18 Q. And the next step was?

19 A. To shut the valves on the by-pass.

20 Q. To shut these valves, and these valves are part of the tap  
21 then? Or is there valves in here that we're not really seeing in  
22 the picture?

23 A. Yeah, they're on this, like right here where the white is.  
24 So we shut that and then there's a cap on top of that, which you  
25 can see right there, --

1 Q. Okay, yep.

2 A. -- take that plug out. Put rags in there to keep gas down so  
3 we can get the Tee's off to put a plug on. But we didn't get to  
4 that point.

5 Q. Yeah. Okay, so when you pulled the gauges, that would have  
6 been the next step after you shut these off?

7 A. I shut these off.

8 Q. Yep.

9 A. Pulled the 2-inch plastic by-pass piece out.

10 Q. Did you hear any sirens when you pulled this separate piece  
11 out?

12 A. I don't know.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. But once this was pulled, and, you know, these valves were  
15 shut, the by-pass was taking out, I took this gauge out.

16 Q. Did you --

17 A. Well actually before this gauge, we took that gauge.

18 Q. Okay, so the first gauge out, this would be the last gauge  
19 out.

20 A. Right, and then when I took this gauge out I plugged it by  
21 hand, no problems --

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. -- as I went to go take this out --

24 Q. Right, so would you again going back to your environment,  
25 your surroundings as far as seeing people coming from their home,



1 or sirens, or the fires, had you seen any of that stuff yet when  
2 you were working, pulling those gauges out?

3 A. No, I don't remember.

4 Q. Okay. So then you pulled the gauges out then you went to  
5 pull this Tee out, it went sideways. So when it went sideways,  
6 did you hear anything at that point?

7 A. Just the officer running around saying that there was fires  
8 coming out of the chimneys and stuff.

9 Q. Okay. But before you saw that --

10 A. I was standing on it trying to keep --

11 Q. Right, right, so this officer wasn't doing much when you  
12 pulled these gauges out.

13 A. No.

14 Q. Pretty much simultaneously when you --

15 A. Doing a detail, that's what he was doing.

16 Q. Okay, so that's about the time frame is when you pulled the  
17 plug out, went sideways, you started getting calls, and that's  
18 kind of, I mean, kind of, we're trying to fit the timeline real  
19 close and when some of the stuff happens, so it's --

20 A. Yeah, I couldn't tell you the time when a police officer  
21 drove by, or a fire engine there --

22 Q. No, I'm just, yeah, audibly, I guess, it was --

23 A. I don't even know what time it was when we --

24 Q. Right, yeah, I'm just trying not the watch time, but just  
25 pointing the work project in the morning --

1 A. Yeah, what I, yeah. But it's tricky because when you're  
2 working, you don't think of the time, you know what I mean, and it  
3 just goes away. It's just, you might think it was 2 minutes, but  
4 it might have been twenty. You --

5 Q. Exactly, okay. So you aren't really sure at what work point  
6 you were at when you started hearing the --

7 A. Right, correct.

8 Q. -- environment changing. People come, or what, do you  
9 remember when people came out of the house, in this area?

10 A. The first house was after we got the valve off for the by-  
11 pass. Once we got that inside the main, and had the valve shut so  
12 gas would stop flowing, is when one of the first houses the lady  
13 said she smelled gas.

14 Q. Okay. Do you remember how that related to when she came out  
15 versus you heard the sirens in the area? Or after that?

16 A. When we saw the house from where the picture was taken,  
17 straight across, you could see it coming out of the chimney, all  
18 the fire engines flying around, coming from every which angle you  
19 could possibly think of, then she came out and then we went house  
20 to house, got everyone out.

21 Q. Okay, so it was approximately when you put the plug back in.  
22 You took your foot off?

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. (Indiscernible) --

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. -- or somewhere around there, give or take a little bit.

2 Okay.

3 A. And then our goal was to just get everyone out, safe, and  
4 phone calls were already being made.

5 Q. That's the only real thing I had to ask on that, so thanks.

6 A. Okay.

7 MR. EVANS: This is Roger Evans. Do you have any questions  
8 Jim?

9 MR. SOUTHWORTH: No, no. questions.

10 BY MR. EVANS:

11 Q. This is Roger Evans. You said you took a 9 o'clock coffee  
12 break? How, 10-minute break? Fifteen-minute break? Half hour?

13 A. Usually 10 minutes.

14 Q. Okay. And then you say you took a lunch, and that was after  
15 the fusion piece had been assembled, right? And fused up and  
16 everything for the waiting period?

17 A. Once it was fused, yes, the waiting period.

18 Q. Okay, and then, approximately did you, is it a half hour  
19 lunch? A hour lunch?

20 A. It's a half hour.

21 Q. Okay. Half hour lunch, sometime after the fusing, fusion,  
22 okay. And you were saying that, you said, I just want to get this  
23 straight, so the other person that was, let's just call this the  
24 people in the wrench -- people in the, in the excavation, the  
25 wrench turner type people that are actually turning wrenches and

1 doing physical OQ kind of work, right?

2 A. Um-hum.

3 Q. So that was yourself, and that was Jose? Correct?

4 A. Yes. Jose is there to help get me what I need as far as  
5 tools, plugs and he helps me with all this.

6 Q. And the other, there's another person there as well?

7 A. Tony's in the truck breaking things down or putting them  
8 together.

9 Q. Okay. Is there, I mean, who else is in the, in the, in the  
10 trench with you there?

11 A. Jose.

12 Q. Just you and Jose.

13 A. Yep.

14 Q. Okay. Then as far as Jose's role that day, I mean, were you  
15 the doer and he was the supplier?

16 A. Yeah, that's pretty much --

17 Q. Providing what you needed?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. And you were doing the work.

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Okay. That's all I have.

22 MR. WALLACE: I'm all set, thank you.

23 BY MR. NELSON:

24 Q. Dave Nelson. How long of the time from the time you pulled  
25 the gauge 'til you pulled the by-pass?

1 A. The last final piece to the by-pass?

2 Q. From when you pulled the gauge, you know, when pulled the by-  
3 pass and it went sideways.

4 A. Well I pulled the plastic first. So once these valves are  
5 shut and I pulled this out from this point to here was 2 minutes.  
6 And then from pulling the gauge, putting a plug in to it, to  
7 pulling the valve and tee off was less than 5.

8 Q. Thank you. That's all I have.

9 MR. EVANS: Okay.

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I'm good thank you.

11 MR. EVANS: Okay.

12 MR. SOUTHWORTH: I'm good.

13 MR. EVANS: I'm good. This concludes the interview.

14 Appreciate you coming in today. We're off the record with the  
15 witness here. Thank you very much.

16 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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

ACCIDENT NUMBER:           PLD18MR003

PLACE:                        Lawrence, Massachusetts

DATE:                         September 17, 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.



Deborah Dowling Sweigart  
Transcriber