



## **SURVIVAL FACTORS ATTACHMENT**

### **First Responder Interviews**

**Spring, Texas**

**HWY21MH007**

**(62 pages)**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

\* \* \* \* \*

Investigation of: \*

\*

FATAL CRASH AND FIRE OF TESLA \*

MODEL S IN SPRING, TEXAS, \*

Accident No.: HWY21FH007

ON APRIL 17, 2021 \*

\*

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: RUSSELL RICE, Battalion Chief

Station 4, The Woodlands, Harris County, Texas

The Woodlands, Harris County, Texas

Friday,  
April 23, 2021

APPEARANCES:

RONALD KAMINSKI  
National Transportation Safety Board

TOM BARTH, Ph.D.  
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Russel Rice:	
By Mr. Kaminski	4
By Dr. Barth	5
By Mr. Kaminski	5
By Dr. Barth	7
By Mr. Kaminski	11
By Dr. Barth	14
By Mr. Kaminski	33
By Dr. Barth	34
By Mr. Kaminski	48

I N T E R V I E W

1  
2 MR. KAMINSKI: Today's date is April 23, 2021. My name is  
3 Ronald Kaminski with the NTSB. I'm here with Tom Barth with the  
4 NTSB, and we are going to be talking to Battalion Chief Russell  
5 Rice who was here at, this is Station...

6 CHIEF RICE: Four.

7 MR. KAMINSKI: ... Station 4, here in The Woodlands. So, he's  
8 going to give us a description of, from the time he got the call  
9 to getting the fire extinguished, and any issues he had regarding  
10 that.

INTERVIEW OF RUSSELL RICE

11  
12 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

13 Q. So, from the time you got the call, approximately what time  
14 was that?

15 A. It was 9:30 p.m., roughly. The actual first call that our  
16 Engine 107 was dispatched to, was for a grass and woods type fire.  
17 It came out as a grass and woods type fire, and then in the  
18 process of them going in route and heading to that location, it  
19 was upgraded to a vehicle fire. Then it was upgraded to a car  
20 crash/vehicle fire. As more information became available The  
21 Woodlands, Harris County, Texas, because it was directly across  
22 the street from residential homes.

23 Q. Um hmm.

24 A. So, initially it was a single truck response, you know, not  
25 a super high priority, and then it upgraded pretty quickly, and

1 then it included, it brought another, which was a ladder truck  
2 (indiscernible) and myself, and then a rescue truck which come  
3 from the other side of town.

4 BY DR. BARTH:

5 Q. So, can you list the vehicles that responded?

6 BY CHIEF RICE:

7 A. Yeah, the ones that responded was Engine 107, was the  
8 primary unit, Truck 108, Rescue 101, and then Battalion 102, and  
9 then we, the only one, everybody made it to scene but the Rescue  
10 truck.

11 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

12 Q. And the Battalion 102 that's you and --

13 A. That's me --

14 Q. -- your driver --

15 A. Yeah, that's my, well that's my --

16 Q. -- in your SUV?

17 A. -- Yes, sir. That's my radio or my unit designation.

18 Q. Okay. And the rescue you said, was?

19 A. 101.

20 Q. Right, that didn't make it out to the scene?

21 A. I cancelled them before they got to scene.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. So, after, and when we got to like the timeline, they are a  
24 fairly good response time away, and once we realized what we had,  
25 I had two units with pumps, and I had the water supply. We were

1 already in the phase where we knew, kind of, we're dealing with  
2 water, water, and water.

3 BY DR. BARTH

4 Q. (Indiscernible)

5 A. Yeah, and that was the other thing, not knowing, I'm not  
6 going to need to cut on the car, I didn't realize there's some  
7 things I didn't anticipate. But not needing to cut on the car,  
8 I'm not going to need cribbing, we're not shoring the vehicle,  
9 it's sitting on its wheels, and so, I didn't think them taking up  
10 space in our scene, as far as the street was, because it got to be  
11 a little bit congested with all the little cars with the sirens  
12 and lights on, taking up the road. So, that's why we disregarded  
13 them. The only benefit they would have been for us, later on,  
14 would have been just for our own personal, like for air, air  
15 bottles and stuff like that, refilling our air things off the  
16 cascade system. But they didn't, wouldn't have provided. They  
17 don't carry water or anything, so.

18 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

19 Q. Right.

20 A. Engine 107 got on location and it went, they initialed this,  
21 the initial notes in the call for the grass fire was from behind  
22 this residence, so he, the guy that was riding as the officer  
23 there started kinds towards that residence, The address changed  
24 as, it kept changing as more information kept coming in because  
25 they started receiving multiple calls that you normally would when

1 something like that goes on. So they went to the first location  
2 real quick, and they couldn't see that it was across the lake,  
3 there's a lake there.

4 Q. A little pond.

5 A. A pond, yeah. And so they came back around, which was, he  
6 said approximately 30-seconds it takes him to turn and come back  
7 that way. So they got on location with a fully involved vehicle,  
8 in the trees, that was his initial size up, and so they went and,  
9 they got off the truck and started going to extinguish the fire.  
10 Truck 108 came in. They're coming from a different direction.  
11 They came in a side gate that's controlled by the desk up front.  
12 This is a gated community. Y'all been in there yet? So it's  
13 gated. It's got pretty good security access. The side gate they  
14 came in, their initial truck would have been there a little  
15 quicker had they been able to use that, but we've never had good  
16 luck with that gate in the past. It's very spotty.

17 BY DR. BARTH:

18 Q. I saw that gate. That's the one that doesn't have any --

19 A. Right, no decorations or any --.

20 Q. Yeah, it doesn't have any attendant and it's got like the  
21 little fire box.

22 A. Right.

23 Q. But you're saying that that --

24 A. It works sometimes. Sometimes it doesn't. Over the years,  
25 since it's been there, it's probably worked 50% of the time. It's



1 not been so reliable. It's so unreliable that the primary units  
2 that respond to that area go to the main gate because 100% of the  
3 time the main gate, you can get through. And so, the secondary  
4 truck was coming up the road. They got on the radio, which is  
5 Truck 108, they're coming from Gosling, so they're  
6 Re coming, they kind of both, both these stations kind of skirt  
7 that creek side park area.

8 Q. Um hmm.

9 A. And so they're coming from this direction, and he got on the  
10 radio and communicated to our dispatch to make sure to contact the  
11 front gate at Carlton Woods and inform them to open that gate.

12 Q. So if you approach that gate, how does that operate?

13 A. It's got, for a long time they had these like, almost like an  
14 easy tag, kind of a toll tag kind of thing on it, but that didn't  
15 work. They've got a Knox box on them now. So you can physically  
16 get off and unlock it, and it'll open it. It's got a momentary,  
17 like you unlock the Knox box with a special key, and then it's got  
18 a momentary switch and it'll allow it to open, but it doesn't  
19 always work.

20 Q. Meaning that, so you'll have the key, no problem with the  
21 key, but when you open it up, --

22 A. Right, it's the mechanism or some kind of communication  
23 between it and it's, however it does its thing.

24 Q. It doesn't wide open the gate. Okay.

25 A. But it's not the key. The key, the key is a standard Knox

1 Box key that, you know, only the fire department carries, so we  
2 have, every truck's got them and they work fine.

3 Q. Um hmm.

4 A. And they have a remote way to open it as well, so.

5 Q. How long do you think that that delayed the entrance?

6 A. Oh, I mean, maybe a minute-ish, I mean --

7 Q. Because then they had to turn around and go down around to  
8 the main gate?

9 A. Well no, they didn't, the main, the first truck did not go,  
10 that was because of the gate, they just went to, it's a little bit  
11 further --

12 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

13 Q. They know that they'll --

14 A. They go, but they go the main every time because we don't  
15 have to --

16 BY DR. BARTH:

17 Q. Oh, okay.

18 A. -- If they would have gone to the secondary gate and it not  
19 open, it would have cost them two to three minutes at least,  
20 because it's a decent enough way down there, and then turn around  
21 and come all the way down and then all the way back up. It would  
22 have been, so that's why they always just go to the front gate.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. So, they could shave a little bit of time going to the  
25 secondary gate, but we don't use it much because of that.

1 Q. Right.

2 A. But the secondary truck was able to get in it. So he got on  
3 the radio and he radioed to our dispatch to contact the Carlton  
4 Woods desk and have them open up the, it's called the Branson  
5 Creek gate. It's the street it's on, and they, he was able to get  
6 in it. I'm coming from, so I'm coming from the same direction  
7 that the main truck came from to the main gates, and the medic  
8 unit, Medic 24 from the, it's through a different entity, but  
9 they're based out of our Station 5, so Montgomery County hospital  
10 district, they are a paramedic ambulance, they were dispatched on  
11 it as well. Sorry I didn't add the medic units.

12 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

13 Q. And what was that? Engine? Or what was that the ambulance  
14 unit again? 5?

15 A. Medic 24.

16 Q. Medic 24.

17 BY DR. BARTH:

18 Q. And that's an AOS unit?

19 A. Yeah. That's a full paramedic box. It had an attendant  
20 paramedic on it, and then there was a medic unit from Station 7  
21 dispatched. I believe they're Cypress Creek Medic 512, but they  
22 never made the scene. Medic 20, when I'm coming, I go across the  
23 road to our main drag over there, Woodlands Parkway, and I'm  
24 heading south down Kirkendall.

25 Q. So they were cancelled when you knew that there wasn't any --

1 A. 512 was when they asked if they needed to respond as well,  
2 and I already had one medic unit on location. I double checked  
3 with them. I knew we had the two fatalities. Initially we were  
4 looking for other people in the woods too, concurrently with the  
5 firefighting operation, so --

6 Q. Um hmm.

7 A. -- but once we realized pretty quickly that we didn't need  
8 any additional medics. So, we turned them back around too because  
9 we didn't need to have --

10 Q. Yeah.

11 A. -- the least amount of people we can keep stacked up on that  
12 road, always tends to be better.

13 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

14 Q. Did Spring Fire Department respond?

15 A. No, sir.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. I don't think so, unless --

18 Q. Maybe that's what the Constable told us that they thought  
19 maybe Spring Creek, Spring responded.

20 A. No, sir. Not that I'm aware of.

21 Q. Okay, it's probably the Cypress Creek.

22 A. Cypress Creek EMS comes out of, and that's based out of our  
23 Station 7.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. Now there's the Spring Unit Londonderry, it's at Kirkendall

1 and Londonderry, they're Station 76. But I'm pretty positive they  
2 weren't on that. I can double check on our notes too, on our call  
3 sheet, but they'll need to label this one a structure fire, but  
4 generally on something like that, it wasn't a full box that would  
5 get, you know, your three pumpers and two ladder trucks, two  
6 battalions and stuff like that. It's a smaller box and I never  
7 turned them around because I don't remember hearing them, so.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. Yeah, now that, so and this is the uniqueness of this  
10 incident is that we're not a city, we're a township. We're the  
11 only township in the state of Texas. Well, what does that mean?  
12 Who knows? You tell me. Basically we're not a city, but, so we  
13 have two, and we encompass all of The Woodlands proper is, this is  
14 all the, so this is The Woodlands, like this, this is the Harris  
15 County line, is this creek. We're all in Montgomery County except  
16 for Creekside. And that's, this is Creekside, so we were right  
17 here. That's the little lake. That's (indiscernible). So, and  
18 we're up here now, is where this Station's at.

19 Q. Oh, yeah, fairly close, yeah.

20 A. Yes, sir. Our other station's right here. So the primary  
21 unit that responded is right here, so, like I said, it's either  
22 they come this way if they can get this Branson Gate, or they come  
23 up the main drag and come in. The other unit that we have is  
24 coming from about, just short of the creek, but like right up,  
25 well right here. That's that Truck 108. They're coming from

1 right there and they're quickest way is to come this way. So,  
2 dealing with the county line is always an interesting thing,  
3 especially that's all in Harris County. So, we've got Constable's  
4 office that comes out of Harris County, it's based out of Spring.  
5 The ME's is a Harris County ME, you know, so it's, all it's Harris  
6 County stuff which creates --

7 Q. Except for the, just that one section there.

8 A. That one section of that is Harris County.

9 Q. Harris County and the rest of The Woodlands --

10 A. Are in Montgomery County

11 Q. In Montgomery County. Okay.

12 A. And it's two different worlds.

13 Q. Yeah.

14 A. Not in a bad way, it's just, it's two different,  
15 everything's, you know, they stop. The cops are different there.  
16 They're procedures are different there. They're Fire Marshall's  
17 Office comes out of a place call The Cascades (indiscernible), so  
18 it's an hour, they're hazmat crew is an hour --

19 Q. Yeah, Tom talked to

20 BY DR. BARTH:

21 Q. (Indiscernible) Singleton.

22 A. Yeah, and I had the interaction, I've never, that I can  
23 recall, I may have seen him, but I've seen him a number of times  
24 at the station I used to work at. They do, like, converts and  
25 stuff at the, the thing that runs security.

1 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

2 Q. Oh, okay.

3 A. I saw and talked to the guy a number of times, and I dealt  
4 with him out there quite bit.

5 BY DR. BARTH:

6 Q. So, this is Station 5?

7 A. No, so that's the, that's where the scene was. Our Station 5

8 --

9 Q. Oh, Station 5, what were --

10 A. That's Station 7, right here.

11 Q. Oh, Station 7, got you.

12 A. And then Station, this is Station 8 right here, which is  
13 Truck 8. And then we are, if you come up Current Camino, we're  
14 right here.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. At Bay Branch, and our Station 5 is right here.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. That's where the medic unit came from.

19 Q. You wouldn't happen to have a, like a print-out of that?

20 A. I can probably, I can get you something.

21 Q. I can take a photograph of it too.

22 A. Well I know we have maps. We used to have these all over the  
23 place. We used to, when we, this was before, when we started  
24 before, 33 we had phones that told us where to go. And when  
25 you were new, you'd get this map and you'd know, that's how you

1 learned how the, the territory.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. I've been here since the '86, so I didn't have to learn.

4 Q. Okay. But we can work on that, but, --

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. So go ahead and continue with your description.

7 A. Well that's the issue. Because some of the problems that I  
8 would consider that I had with the scene, as far as logistical  
9 stuff, was all based on the county line stuff, but firefighting  
10 wise, nothing. They get on location. The next truck comes in  
11 right behind them. I'm approximately a minute behind Truck 108,  
12 and then the medic unit's right behind me, like I can see them.  
13 They come, so I'm coming south on Kirkendall. They come this way,  
14 and they come in behind me right here, and then, so we're just  
15 right down the road we're in, and so they came in right behind me.  
16 So, we're on location pretty quick. I get out of the car. I walk  
17 up. Truck 108 is taking command which is our policy, you know,  
18 first in, the second in Woodland's unit will try to usually take  
19 command until the BC gets there. So then I make, I want to go  
20 make face-to-face with him to see what's going on. I walk up and  
21 they've already got --

22 Q. So who was that initial Incident Commander?

23 A. Truck 108 officer, our officer, his name is Row, Roald.

24 BY MR. KAMINSKI

25 Q. How do you spell that?



- 1 A. R-O-A-L-D, Hoppel, H-O-P-P-E-L
- 2 Q. H-O-P-P-E-L?
- 3 A. Yes, sir, I believe so. He's Dutch.
- 4 Q. Okay.
- 5 A. And he took the initial and really, I don't think, the only  
6 think that he, that they had time to do was their crew came up,  
7 came forward to assist there. They already had a hose line on the  
8 ground and then one of them, one of his crew had a TIC and then  
9 the officer that riding on our Engine 107 had a thermal imaging  
10 camera that two firefighters were putting out the fire and just  
11 based on the presentation we had, it was like, there was no roof  
12 on the car that we could really tell, and so didn't know if there  
13 were going to be occupants that had been ejected or anything like  
14 that out in the woods, and it was kind of just enough in the woods  
15 to where you couldn't see anything around it. So, they were  
16 scanning the woods trying to make sure there was no other  
17 occupants in the vehicle.
- 18 Q. Um hmm.
- 19 A. But the fire went out --
- 20 BY DR. BARTH:
- 21 Q. Scanning in the woods with a thermal camera?
- 22 A. With the thermal camera and walking through the woods because  
23 it was dark already.
- 24 Q. You mentioned that one of the other officers had a TIC. What  
25 does that reference?

1 A. TIC, Thermal Imaging Camera.

2 Q. Oh, okay.

3 A. That's, sorry, that's just what we call it, but they, the  
4 fire knockdown was, I mean, the main body of the fire, I'd say, 30  
5 45 seconds probably, but let's call it a minute, a minute and a  
6 half, not very long. Just like a typical car fire where you're  
7 contents inside, all that stuff, you just --

8 Q. Yeah, and what did you guys use to --

9 A. Just water.

10 Q. Just straight water--

11 A. Straight water.

12 Q. -- with an adjustable hose?

13 A. Um hmm. Just a preconnected fire hose and they used just  
14 straight water on it, and it, it knocks it down quick. Very  
15 little bit (indiscernible) --

16 Q. So, they immediately connected with a, to the hydrant,  
17 correct?

18 A. Well, no, they were off the tank water on the truck.

19 Q. Oh, okay.

20 A. So, that truck carries, every truck carries 500-gallons of  
21 water with it.

22 Q. Oh, okay, I guess already had the hose line hooked up, but  
23 that was to the truck, not to the fire hydrant.

24 A. To the truck, right, right, yeah. So, it is preconnected, so  
25 like on our trucks, we'll have, like that particular truck has

1 three preconnected hose lines right there in a tray.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. And then they can grab them, inch and three-quarter lines,  
4 and two-inch lines, and then we have bumper lines that are  
5 preconnected.

6 Q. Do you know which line, what size of line they were using?

7 A. It was an inch and three-quarter line. I do know that.

8 Q. And, so you hooked up an inch and three-quarter line, you  
9 used, I imaging an adjustable --

10 A. Right.

11 Q. -- fog stream hose and apply to about a minute and a half.

12 A. Yeah, if that, I mean, like, it was quick to put out the main  
13 body of the fire, and so at that point we could see, like I said,  
14 it almost looked like a convertible. So much had burned already  
15 on the car that there was no A-post. There was no discernible  
16 place to say that was where the windshield was. There was about  
17 half-way down the B-posts were burned, so the roof was completely  
18 gone. There was no structure at all, -- structure. And then you  
19 could see where the struts come out of the rear, coming behind the  
20 passenger compartment in the rear where the rear struts had kind  
21 of protruded out from the back of the car. After that, it was  
22 out, that portion of it was out. We pretty quickly realized that  
23 the front right corner was still burning at a pretty high rate,  
24 but it was a small, localized area, and so, knowing, at that  
25 point, in between all this, we're figuring, trying to figure out

1 what do we have? What kind of car it is? There's no way to tell  
2 what kind of car it is. The way we found, look at the left, it  
3 was the left rear wheel, in the center cap on the wheel had the  
4 Tesla emblem. That's how we identified it, because -

5 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

6 Q. The left rear?

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. And it was like, Oh, that's a Tesla. Then the body of the  
10 fire goes out, we still got all this, we got a heavy little spot  
11 down here in the front and it's like, "Ahhh", and then we start  
12 realizing, okay, this is an electric vehicle, and we start kind-of  
13 getting a little bit more cautions now.

14 BY DR. BARTH:

15 Q. Can you describe when describe when you say it like that,  
16 heavy spot, was it flames? How big were there they? Was there  
17 smoke?

18 A. Yeah, they were, it was flames, it was orange, with blue  
19 tips. I remember it had pretty blue tips on it.

20 Q. About how high?

21 A. Probably about a foot and a half from the top of the car, so  
22 maybe from the ground, maybe two and a half, three feet. And just  
23 in that right front corner area.

24 Q. And was it, did you see it jetting?

25 A. Yeah. It was kind of violent, but it wasn't like run for

1 your life violent, you know what I mean? It was violent enough to  
2 where it was like it was, it was almost like it was a pressurized  
3 something or other, that was burning off, and you know, we just  
4 didn't know exactly what all the contents were, or what they  
5 looked like. But again, so they took the initial thing was, Oh,  
6 let's put, so we put two dry-chem's on it, and it knocked the fire  
7 part down for about 10 seconds and then it poofed right back up  
8 because it didn't cool it at all. And so we're --

9 Q. The Dry-Chem's, if you could describe what that is?

10 A. It's portable fire extinguisher Dry-Chem, dry chemical  
11 portable fire extinguishers that we keep on the trucks.

12 Q. Oh, okay.

13 A. And, we had, you know, we don't carry a ton of them on trucks  
14 because we don't generally use those. We have other stuff. So we  
15 dumped those on there and it was like, like I said it was, Oh,  
16 cool, that worked for a second of two. And then we started, so  
17 then we kind of were like, as a group started to think, the first  
18 thing I did is get on the phone, we've got our, we have our own  
19 hazmat team as well. They're at Station 2 and so I got on the  
20 phone and called the Lieutenant that was, he's my resource for  
21 hazmat stuff, and got on the phone with him. Told him what we had  
22 and what we --

23 Q. And what's his name?

24 A. His name is Michael Helmcamp, H-E-L-M-C-A-M-P.

25 Q. And he's with the (indiscernible) we're going to talk to one

1 of the Hazmat guys.

2 A. He's with our Hazmat, not theirs. Not the Harris County one.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. But, --

5 Q. We're going to talk to Harris County Hazmat later today, so.

6 A. Yeah, but I didn't, I know they were out there, and I saw  
7 them and talked to them, but I didn't deal with them very one on  
8 one.

9 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

10 Q. Well they came a couple hours later.

11 A. Yeah, it was, they were initially, they were added because of  
12 the ME wanted to de-con the bodies as what, is what I was told.

13 Q. Yeah, I got the full story out of that from Singleton.

14 A. Yeah. But I contacted mine because I wanted, he's my kind of  
15 like I said, he's my hazmat resource. So he started resourcing,  
16 or researching it pretty quickly. I grabbed my phone. I believe  
17 it was the Chief that was next to me, our Chief, Bucky showed up,  
18 he came out, and he was researching and I pulled up the first  
19 thing I did was Googled Tesla Car Fire and it took me to Tesla's  
20 first responder page and then realized pretty quickly, water,  
21 water, water, water, water. I'm like, okay cool, we have a  
22 hydrant right there. Boom, that's when our game plans just went  
23 straight to water and that's what we did. So, --

24 BY DR. BARTH:

25 Q. Now how did you decide where to apply that water, or how to

1 apply that water?

2 A. Basically just by putting it on the fire and cooling, and  
3 once we realized, okay what we have, now the containers, the  
4 length of the containers, so to speak, of the battery trays, at  
5 first it's up, we're up in this front area, so it's pretty easy to  
6 access that area and cool that area, and that was our primary  
7 concern, not knowing yet the detail of what's all underneath it  
8 like that. That came about later as it, as we'd get little pop-  
9 ups. So, immediately it was like, just we're cooling the area,  
10 and we left the hose line on it the whole, so like we knocked it  
11 down. It was pretty mundane. It was kind of just hanging out and  
12 we left a guy on an inch and three-quarter line, probably flowing  
13 100, 150 gallons a minute, nothing crazy, just to keep it cook, to  
14 keep it wet.

15 Q. Um hmm. And did you say that you saw little hot spots at  
16 other places on the --

17 A. Well, not initially. That was initially it was all in that  
18 front side. And then we started to get little wisps of, like when  
19 I read one of the things in there, it was perfect example of what  
20 we saw, it would be like white smoke and it was a very thick  
21 concentrated, like a Santa Claus's beard, kind of white smoke.

22 Q. And was that coming from where?

23 A. Underneath the car, like, you know, it was starting to push  
24 out from underneath the car and swirling and then it would, if you  
25 let it go too long, it would pop off, and then you'd have some of

1 that directional, and the hissing, and the popping sounds, and  
2 stuff like that. And at that point, it's later into the incident,  
3 because we had a good, I mean, it was probably a 45-minute time  
4 period, give or set, give or take, where it's like it wasn't doing  
5 anything. It was, everything was cool, perfectly calm.

6 Q. And you're still running the --

7 A. I'm still running the line on it.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. But it's like --

10 Q. When you prop, when you're running that line on it, where are  
11 you just running that stream? Where on it?

12 A. Trying to, directionally trying to go under the car as much  
13 as we can. But --

14 Q. From the front?

15 A. From the front, it was from the front left. They took it  
16 around, they would walk around kind of the vehicle and, but, for  
17 the most part, it was mostly coming from if you're in the car,  
18 front right kind of area is where they were applying the water  
19 from. When it started to do the other stuff, we realized the  
20 issue of we could, the car was sitting on its belly, I mean, there  
21 was no give and it was sitting in mud no at this point, but it was  
22 sitting on the ground. So, we started kind of brain storming,  
23 because now we're having, we know it's coming from underneath the  
24 vehicle at this point, and it's here and then it'll be over here,  
25 and then it'll be over here, in little bursts. So we, the only



1 thing we can really do at that point is get up under, get the  
2 vehicle up a little bit so that we can make access to the  
3 underneath of it. And so, what we did was used our hydraulic  
4 extraction tool, so like, it's the spreader, with some cribbing,  
5 and a little bit of (indiscernible) because it was pretty muddy so  
6 we had to kind of jam some stuff in there. But we got it and we  
7 took some step chocks, and they're just like a stair step, just  
8 got it up, I'd say it was only approximately eight inches up off  
9 the ground. That went only on the left-hand side, and it was by  
10 the lift, we lifted it where the lifting point are, according to  
11 their --

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. -- their manufacture stuff. Because we had that information  
14 at that time. So we get it up on its side with the stair chock  
15 there, and then we applied what's called a blitz fire, which is a  
16 monitor, it's basically a big hose. It's up to a 500gpm flow with  
17 a three-inch line. We set that there and we could apply water and  
18 we can move the water, but we could just keep applying a steady  
19 stream of water and if guys wanted to step back out of the area,  
20 and it'd still be running in the unmanned, because it actually  
21 has, you know, arms that stick in the ground and stuff like that.  
22 After that, it was pretty effective for cooling.

23 Q. And so you're applying that stream to the from which --

24 A. From, now we're on the left side of the, we're on the street  
25 side, which is the left side of the vehicle if you're looking at

1 it. And it's on its side and we're applying that water straight  
2 in this way.

3 Q. Just onto the middle of the bottom?

4 A. Middle of the bottom and then we're rotating it around,  
5 because there still going to, there's still a couple pops and  
6 hisses and stuff like that that it still needs to be positioned if  
7 something opens up over here and starts doing it with  
8 (indiscernible) over there. And the flow on that thing is 500  
9 gallons a minute. I wouldn't say that we were flowing at full  
10 bore, and I wouldn't say that all the water was hitting exactly  
11 where it needed to. We knew it was a little bit overkill, but we  
12 have a hydrant. The water's not a problem. So, we might have  
13 wasted a little bit of water, but I was cool with that.

14 Q. Um hmm.

15 A. That was better than the alternative.

16 Q. So all together, what would you estimate would be the total  
17 water you used?

18 A. We looked. So one guy did a math calculation basically on  
19 scene, kind of fly by his seat, and he was saying 27,000 gallons.  
20 The driver, he's the normally a driver, he was riding officer that  
21 day, he looked as the, after they shut the pump off, and have not  
22 shut the truck down and he looked at the flow meter, and he said  
23 20,000.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. I, so I'd say, the rough calculations, I'm sure that it was

1 close to his guess and all this stuff, but if it says 20,000 on  
2 that, and they were done flowing the water, then I'm fairly  
3 accurate.

4 Q. There's a meter on the truck that'll tell you, even if you're  
5 running more than one line, --

6 A. Well it depends on if, it depends on which, on our trucks it  
7 depends on if they're foam lines. If they're available to flow  
8 foam. We weren't flowing foam, but all of our foam lines, that's  
9 where we get our reading from the foam system, so if it's a line  
10 that can be used with water and foam, we can get flow readings off  
11 of it. And that's where we got them from. Because both those  
12 lines were pretty connected foam lines that we can use.

13 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

14 Q. And how about from fire hydrant?

15 A. We don't have anything that tells us, we don't have any way  
16 to tell what we brought in. We don't have like an intake counter,  
17 or anything like that, and we don't have anything on the hydrants.  
18 I mean the water district ought to be able to look at the flows to  
19 some degree and guestimate. Because they can boost them and stuff  
20 like that under --

21 Q. Okay.

22 BY DR. BARTH

23 Q. But you said 20,000 gallons is the estimate of the total  
24 water usage --

25 A. That's total from start to finish.

1 Q. -- With the hydrant and the truck (indiscernible) --

2 A. Yes, sir.

3 Q. -- Just by looking at the --

4 A. What we flowed out of the truck total. So like, from the  
5 time it went in the pump gear until it came out of pump gear,  
6 basically.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. So that's the whole event.

9 Q. Got you. That's useful.

10 A. Yeah, and -

11 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

12 Q. Because then we've seen reports, that's why we're asking.

13 A. Well and that's --

14 Q. We've seen reports of over 30,000 gallons --

15 A. And I, you know, I believe it. And I, because if you tell a  
16 fireman, you just need to put water on it, we're just going to  
17 throw a bunch of water on it. And, I think we would have, had the  
18 car probably out of the woods part, to where we could get a little  
19 bit better access to stuff like that, had there not have been two  
20 people still inside, and some of that, the logistics of it is,  
21 we've got everybody coming from Houston area and this way, so it  
22 takes time, and then the Fire Marshall's office, their Hazmat, the  
23 ME, the cops, the four different entities that aren't in our  
24 playing field normally, and it took, I mean, it was three hours,  
25 three and a half hours before the ME even was in route I think, or

1 got there for sure.

2 BY DR. BARTH:

3 Q. So you cribbed up the vehicle about half, and you said the  
4 left side of the vehicle was elevated about how high?

5 A. Eight inches tops.

6 Q. Oh, okay.

7 A. Yeah, yeah.

8 Q. So not enough to --

9 A. No.

10 Q. -- really affect the positioning of the (indiscernible)

11 A. No, and that was one of the big things we were, because  
12 (indiscernible). It's a crime scene until it's not, or whatever,  
13 you know. And Singleton, because I can remember Singleton walked  
14 up to me, about the time they were getting ready to crib it, and  
15 he taps me on the shoulder and he kind of points, he's like, Is  
16 that necessary? And I was like, "Well yeah, we have to get  
17 underneath there", because we got to cool this down.

18 Q. Right.

19 A. I said, "I promise we're not going mess up your scene." That  
20 wasn't our indicating, everything we were doing was to preserve as  
21 much as we could, but really honestly, except for the initial  
22 attach and then then the initial little burst in the front right  
23 side, most of the fire, and most of the, our problems were all  
24 from underneath the vehicle, so we weren't applying mass amounts  
25 of water into the vehicle compartment, into the passenger

1 compartment, so as far as we were concerned, we were preserving  
2 the scene fine. We weren't crawling around in there. We weren't  
3 touching anything. We were just skeeting water, trying to tunnel  
4 with a nozzle under the dirt and make a tunnel, and that's when we  
5 decided we needed to get it up a little bit, because I mean, it  
6 was literally sitting, you know, belly's, belly flat on the  
7 ground.

8 Q. Right.

9 A. But that worked for a while until it didn't work, and then  
10 moving around the car, so that's when we decided that lifting the  
11 car up wouldn't. And that's, honestly, I think the best way to do  
12 it. I mean, obviously if you could turn it on a rotisserie and  
13 get to the bottom, you could sit there and cool it all day, in a  
14 perfect world. That's the only way you're going to cool that  
15 whole. Looking at it now, hind sight, 20/20 stuff, I feel pretty  
16 confident with what the guys did as far as getting it done safely  
17 and effectively.

18 Q. So then, at what point did you decide that it had to cool  
19 enough.

20 A. It was about an hour after we started applying that --

21 Q. The three-inch line.

22 A. -- the big stream that they started talking about going in  
23 and at first it was the Fire Marshall's office was going to go in  
24 and do some pictures and stuff like that, of the scene and all  
25 that stuff before the ME, and then it was --

1 Q. Did you use the thermal? You were using the thermal camera?

2 A. Yeah, they had, we have like ten of them on scene, so a lot  
3 of guys were walking around peeking at it and stuff like that,  
4 plus it had been a good long while before we had it, since we had  
5 any little flair ups of any kind.

6 Q. Um hmm.

7 A. Of course, now, after reading some of that information, I'd  
8 probably be more skeptical, even of more flair ups. Because you  
9 know, typically a regular fire, it's like you put it out, if it's  
10 out for an hour, it's generally, and you soak it for an hour, it's  
11 not coming back. But with seeing, reading that and, you now,  
12 about the days and movement and stuff like that, it's a little bit  
13 scary.

14 Q. Um hmm.

15 A. But anyway, so they went in and did their pictures and stuff  
16 like that. There was a time when I had to transfer command back  
17 to that Truck 108 officer. Because we had, we had a guy get  
18 injured in the process of them charging the hose line. He was the  
19 driver of Truck 108. He was wearing, he wasn't wearing bunker  
20 gear or anything, he wasn't at, like, on the car scene. He was  
21 just by the truck, and I guess he tripped over the hose, or the  
22 hose hit him and he went down. So I had to run him up to the  
23 doctor, to the emergency room, and while I was there, I got us  
24 some air bottles, because we were running pretty short on air.

25 Q. What was his injury?

1 A. He still hasn't gotten with the orthopedic yet, but right now  
2 we're thinking it's a knee sprain. It's a minor knee injury.

3 Q. Um hmm.

4 A. That night they, of course, our policy is we go to the  
5 emergency room and they did a x-ray and all that kind of stuff,  
6 which was negative, which we knew it would be because there was  
7 nothing broke, and send him for a follow-up with the ortho. He's  
8 still off for ortho right now.

9 Q. So all your guys in operation are wearing a CBA.

10 A. Oh, yeah, completely the whole time. And that was the other  
11 deal, this, like so we went through approximately 10 to 12 bottles  
12 off our trucks, and that's the one thing that I had done  
13 different, was going forward realizing the resources. I didn't,  
14 it was a car fire, I didn't think it was going to take as many  
15 bottles as we used on a house fire. Essentially that's what it  
16 did because we were keeping our guys in air the whole time. They  
17 weren't, it wasn't like they were taxed physically because they  
18 weren't having to work super hard, but it was we were keeping in  
19 respiratory protection because we didn't know what any of it was.  
20 And the I, the stuff we would know, it's not good, so at that  
21 point I took 10 bottles with me to our Station 5 has a cascade  
22 unit and I took the bottles and the firefighter, dropped him off,  
23 filled the bottles, brought them back to the scene, and then so we  
24 had air. And, but --

25 Q. Ten bottles you said?



1 A. Ten, it was ten 30-minute cylinders that I had which, and a  
2 30-minute cylinder, but these guys weren't breathing them  
3 consistently the whole time. Like they'd do breathing when  
4 they're in the hazard zone, then they would take a break and walk  
5 away, and rest for a minute and another guy would come in, but  
6 literally, one guy was manning the line. We could really run one  
7 guy at a time for just the cooling stuff, and then when we put the  
8 blitz down, it was really just coming up and checking on things  
9 periodically. They didn't have to stand directly in the hazard  
10 area. But that same, the officer that initially took command, he  
11 was the one that kept it with, when I left, and so Singleton  
12 called me twice during that, three times, two times during that  
13 when I left and one of them was about the hazmat. He called me,  
14 stated that ME wanted the bodies decontaminated before they put  
15 them in, because of the hazardous materials implications, or  
16 whatever they thought they could have on them from the batteries.  
17 And I said, Okay. And then he said I'm about to call Harris  
18 County Hazmat, do you want to call your guys and see, because  
19 they're closer. I said, I'll call my guys, they're right down the  
20 street. I was like, you tell me, I don't, (indiscernible), and  
21 he's like, yeah, well we can call your guys, so I picked up the  
22 phone and called Station 2 again, and I talked to Helmcamp, Mike  
23 Helmcamp again, and I said, Hey, get your, bring the, we have a  
24 hazmat truck and an engine, but the jump truck, so just the normal  
25 crew would bring both trucks and I was going to take, at that

1 point, because now we've got cop cars like you wouldn't believe  
2 lining up, and they don't park on one side of the road, they park  
3 all over the place so we can't get stuff through. But I'm  
4 thinking if I can get, I'll get the road cleared out enough to get  
5 them in, which means I'll get Truck 8 out, and I've got one of  
6 their firemen with me, so I was going to take them and put them  
7 back in service, that way I only had two units there, but I'd have  
8 plenty of good resources for it. He's like, Cool, we'll head that  
9 way. As soon as I get off the phone Singleton calls me back and  
10 says, Hey man, you can, the best I can recall, it was you can  
11 either, you guys can still come if you want, but we have to use  
12 Harris County because of the something to do with the ME, and I'm  
13 like, okay, that's fine, you know. And I believe he said, you  
14 know, you can keep your guys coming if you want to. I said, no,  
15 I, we'll turn them around, they don't need to come, and we put  
16 them back in service.

17 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

18 Q. And why did you have to use the Harris County guys? I mean,-  
19 -

20 A. I think it was, the indication I got was that it was because  
21 it's a Harris County, that it's a Harris County Medical Examiner.  
22 It's the Harris County Hazmat Team. It's the Harris County Fire  
23 Marshall's office. And I think they were trying to keep  
24 everything within the same umbrella.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. Which I get it, you know,

2 Q. Um hmm.

3 A. So, it was like, Okay. I just knew that they were going to  
4 be delayed response because they're an hour, it's an hour, and I  
5 think it was approximately an hour before they got on location  
6 from the time they were dispatched.

7 BY DR. BARTH:

8 Q. At what point did you, because said it was their scene, so  
9 that indicates that at some point you had transferred scene  
10 control to the Fire Marshall.

11 A. Yeah, but not in a formal, there was no formal, I guess, if  
12 you will, it's just kind of an understood thing, when they show  
13 us, they're the guys with guns, so we kind of just, we're always -  
14 -

15 Q. So by the time you guys were saying okay, you guys can start  
16 your photographs and stuff, and we've got the thing cooled down, -  
17 -

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. -- that's when the (indiscernible) --

20 A. Actually I mean, even before that, we were starting to, yeah,  
21 functionally I would say yeah, that'd be a good time frame to say  
22 it. I'd say informally, you know, they arrive on scene, other  
23 than putting out, doing actual firefighting stuff, we're kind of  
24 following their direction.

25 Q. Um hmm.

1 A. And we deal with their Fire Marshall's office more than we  
2 deal with any of the other entities, just based on the location  
3 and they're a very active group. They have good staffing, and  
4 they respond, and our county has taken time, but it's getting  
5 there, but sometimes we wouldn't see our county Fire Marshalls for  
6 like two day on a suspected fire. We'd have to, you know, put  
7 fire line tape around it and that was supposed to keep everybody  
8 out. But, so that, but they actually, they're very quick on their  
9 responses. So, you know, they get there and, other than, like I  
10 said, active firefighting stuff, he's the one calling, he's  
11 talking to these folks, the MEds and stuff like that and the  
12 Constable, I didn't see, I never spoke to one of them. I know  
13 that they were on, doing a bunch of reports and all this stuff,  
14 and saying they told the fire department how to put out the fire  
15 and all this kind of, we didn't talk to them. There was a bunch  
16 of cars there, but I don't recall any of them ever coming up  
17 saying, they never said anything to me. I, we've talked to Hopple  
18 and stuff. Nobody, he had, I take that back. He had some  
19 interaction with them, but not on the fire side, on the  
20 EMS/Personnel side when they were talking to the wife.

21 Q. I was going to ask, I heard that there was a medical issue at  
22 some point with one of the bystanders?

23 A. Right, and that was a, that was another complexity of the  
24 two-county thing. We have a medic unit there. They're not there,  
25 what we call, they're dedicated to the scene, but they had

1 initially had checked with the family member.

2 Q. Um hmm.

3 A. She determined that she didn't need to be treated. So, but  
4 they were still, so they were cleared, but they were with us,  
5 right by us staged on scene, and then out of the, I'm talking they  
6 had a, one of their supervisors came out and I'm standing there  
7 talking to her and we look and then here comes a stretcher with  
8 two medics that are from Cypress Creek and they just walked  
9 through the middle of the thing pushing the stretcher right  
10 through the back side of the scene on the road, and we're like,  
11 What are they here for? Where did they come from? They weren't  
12 on our call. One of the Constables had called a medic unit for  
13 one of the bystanders, whether it's a family member or not, I  
14 don't know.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. But we had a medic unit on scene. So that's the  
17 communication that we have between because, their dispatch  
18 centers. We have our own dispatch that does our county, and then  
19 they have one that does theirs, and the ambulances. So, that's  
20 their dispatch center that ambulance comes from their facility  
21 came, so it's just kind of odd because we had a medic unit there  
22 the whole time.

23 Q. So they, and that, so your medic unit had assessed --

24 A. They assessed, I'm not a hundred percent --

25 Q. (Indiscernible) sure it's the same person that--

1 A. Right, but they did assess, they did go down there and assess  
2 someone, and I know two of our firefighters went down there and  
3 they were asking if they could get her anything and she, because  
4 she was cold, it was kind of cold outside, and asked if she needed  
5 a jacket and she said they won't let me go, they won't let me  
6 leave and she pointed at the police, and, so they ended up asking  
7 him if he had a jacket or something, he said no, so they ended up  
8 finding her a blanket because she was cold. And they came back to  
9 the scene and that Lieutenant Hopple was, he did interact with  
10 family members and then there was another family member, I guess a  
11 daughter, maybe or that called, was on the phone, and one of our  
12 guys gave directions, driving directions how to get to where we  
13 were. And that's the only interaction with the police that I know  
14 that we had at all. From that standpoint. And I was still in the  
15 pocket of the fire scene, not going outside of that.

16 Q. Right.

17 A. But --

18 Q. And so then when it eventually became time to, well, so yeah,  
19 so you guys, once you finished your operations and the Fire  
20 Marshalls and stuff started taking over, so you guys weren't  
21 involved at all with extrication or then moving, or then releasing  
22 the vehicle to the tow yard or anything like that?

23 A. They, we, I had already left again to go pick that other guy  
24 back up when they released the vehicle to the tow yard, but, which  
25 Hopple probably has the best answer for that portion of it. They

1 did assist the ME with getting the patients out of the vehicle  
2 because it was just --

3 Q. Who assisted?

4 A. Our firemen. They had no, nobody else was helping with the,  
5 they had the hazmat team out there. They weren't doing anything,  
6 and so, it's either (indiscernible) --

7 Q. Oh, the Fire Marshalls, they're more like supervisors, that  
8 sort of thing.

9 A. Yeah, they were --

10 Q. They're not operational (indiscernible).

11 A. Yeah, I thought, initially I thought they were going to like,  
12 because they asked me if we had air packs for them and stuff like  
13 that, and I said, we can get you some air packs. They were  
14 talking like that, I thought they were going to suit up and go in  
15 there and actually help them move them, but they didn't, and I  
16 don't know if that's in their purview or not. Our guys were not  
17 opposed to doing, to helping, it was two little Medical Examiner  
18 women, you know, that came, so they were helping them out, and  
19 that. We had assumed that that's what the Hazmat team had been  
20 called to de-con, but to also they have, you know, specialty suits  
21 and stuff like that --

22 Q. Um hmm.

23 A. -- which could do both, you know, chemical and biohazard type  
24 stuff like a tieback would have been nice to put on a guy instead  
25 of bunker gear, but, you know, incapsulated, face shields, and

1 stuff like that. But they weren't, according to them, they were  
2 just there to de-con and they didn't even have to do that because  
3 they were putting them in a body bag is what their Lieutenant told  
4 me. And it was kind of an informal thing because I'm kind of just  
5 getting frustrated. I'm like, what are you all here for then?  
6 And they were just, they, standing there.

7 Q. So the Death Inv, so the ME's office, Death Investigators are  
8 from Harris County then, that are there.

9 A. Yes, sir.

10 Q. And what's the typical protocol for that, as far as removing  
11 the bodies?

12 A. Generally the ME or the, or in past ones that I've had in our  
13 county, you'll have either a Judge or the Justice of the Peace  
14 come out, and you know, make a declaration that their deceased and  
15 then the ME, if it's an investigation, or if not, it's the  
16 coroner's office, or the funeral home people come out and they  
17 get, I mean, they've pulled burned people out of cars. I've  
18 watched those guy do it more than anybody.

19 Q. Um hmm.

20 A. And that's generally what happens there. There, literally  
21 they sent these two really small ladies, and it was kind of a  
22 weird deal, and then our guys removed the door, so the left rear  
23 door was removed by our guys, and that was after, that was to  
24 remove the final patient because, or victim because they thought  
25 for autopsy purposes all that stuff, they, and that was them and



1 the ME talking about it, just picking the patient up and trying to  
2 lift him over a door or over the seats, or that stuff they thought  
3 manipulated the body too much you might have some problems, and so  
4 that's why they took the door off which I was totally cool with.

5 Q. Which door?

6 A. It was the left door.

7 Q. Left rear, left rear. Did it look to you like the front  
8 doors would have been jammed shut, or inaccessible, or was it  
9 hard, too hard to tell from the fire?

10 A. Yeah, I would say that it didn't look like anything, and I'm,  
11 I have a, there's a picture on the, that was on the newspaper, to  
12 jog my memory here, but it was at the end of it. But I don't  
13 recall the front doors looking like there was anything that,  
14 except for there wasn't to, well that, I say that, myself  
15 personally, I did not walk to that other side of the vehicle, I  
16 didn't see it from the woods side because I was staying out of  
17 their way and I didn't have protective equipment on. But the left  
18 side definitely didn't look like it couldn't have been open, but,  
19 that I can recall. It was unremarkable that --

20 Q. Um hmm, Okay.

21 A. Let's see, let's see with this, yeah or, it wasn't there.  
22 That's what it was, there wasn't a front door. Oh, now what?  
23 That's after the, that's late into the thing. We cut that door  
24 off. There was nothing here. There was nothing there.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. Both sides. Burnt. The roof was like that structure you see  
2 there.

3 Q. Yeah, so you made it sound like that that roof looked like  
4 that early on.

5 A. That was what it looked like when we got there.

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. Yes, sir. No, it was, I mean, when the fire went out, that's  
8 what we had, minus the door.

9 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

10 Q. The first time, the first time the fire went out?

11 A. Yes, sir. The main body of the fire. After that we're, you  
12 see it's on the belly here, but like, we were literally fighting  
13 those spot fires up in this side, on the woods side over here,  
14 initially, and then we were moving around this way and that was  
15 when we were hitting all the battery stuff and that's when we  
16 decided that needed to get the car up a little bit and stuff like  
17 that.

18 Q. Got you.

19 A. So it wasn't, and I normally would take more pictures, but  
20 being that there was, there were two fatalities in there and stuff  
21 like that, in a neighborhood where people could see. I didn't want  
22 the look of me sitting there taking a bunch of pictures. There  
23 were a lot of people taking pictures. The Fire Marshall guys were  
24 taking, they got plenty of pictures, I'm sure for you. We usually  
25 take tons of pictures of fires because you got fires, but the fact

1 that the bodies were in there and you could see them and stuff, I  
2 just didn't think it was appropriate. That's the wrecker, the bed  
3 of the flat bed wrecker, so this is right before they load it.

4 BY DR. BARTH:

5 Q. So you were there when they loaded it?

6 A. No, sir, I was not. This was the picture, this picture I  
7 actually got off of, I was there as they were, I left as they were  
8 cutting this door.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. They had removed the first, the person in the front seats, or  
11 in the front part of the compartment, and they were working on the  
12 back when they were removing the door is when I left, and then  
13 this picture is actually from the news reporter guy.

14 Q. Oh, that's (indiscernible) Kindner?

15 A. Yeah, his, he has a, he does freelance stuff for all the  
16 channels, I guess, and he has a tenancy to be very sneaky and  
17 sneak up in the scenes. I did not, I don't remember seeing him.

18 Q. It sounds like you've described pretty much what we need with  
19 the on-scene operations. Can you describe the training and/or  
20 knowledge of electric vehicle issues that you or the general  
21 department has?

22 A. I'd say in general, we were talking it earlier with a couple  
23 of guys. We had a class, it's been a number of years ago where  
24 somebody came in and gave a really good presentation, and a lot of  
25 it was more geared towards cutting on the cars, and killing the

1 loop, and you know, what not to cut and this that and the other.  
2 It wasn't as much fire related. We haven't done a whole lot on  
3 fire of this type. As a matter of fact, this is the first time  
4 any of us that were involved in it, and any of us or in our  
5 department, that I'm aware of, because nobody's come to me and  
6 said, Hey, this is what we did. You know. That our department's  
7 run into this problem.

8 Q. Does your department all professional, or --

9 A. Yes, sir. We're all paid, fully paid. We have some 155  
10 people. So we have eight stations with one dual company, so it's  
11 nine total companies, a day, plus two battalions. And we cover a  
12 fairly large area, population of about approximately 125, 130,000  
13 people just in The Woodlands area. We've got a couple major  
14 highways going through --

15 Q. Um hmm.

16 A. -- A lot of traffic. We run a lot of car wrecks, but we've  
17 never had anything like this. It's scary, when you don't know.

18 Q. And then, how many have, do you remember many electric  
19 vehicle crashes, not just fires, but just electric vehicle  
20 crashes?

21 A. No, not, not a very remarkable amount. That's, I don't want  
22 to say that we're complacent on it, it's just that we, you know,  
23 we maybe not, now I will say there are some guys that, the truck  
24 that has, the rescue company, that has the rescue tools, all of  
25 our trucks carry rescue tools, hydraulic extrication tools, we

1 have a specialty rescue truck that it does technical rescue stuff  
2 as well. I know those guys. They probably focus a little bit  
3 more on the details of the auto extrication stuff as far as trends  
4 and stuff like that, probably follow it a little bit more, and so  
5 they would have a better knowledge, most likely, of the electric  
6 stuff, but I don't think anybody realized, and I didn't realize  
7 until I started reading up on it afterward, is like the  
8 differences, you know, cause this all came about when Prius' and  
9 stuff were there. So you had a little motor, a little gas motor  
10 and a little electric motor, you know, so it's all changed  
11 considerable since then. And so one of the things that came about  
12 from our incident which is just a week, not even a week all the  
13 way yet, is that, Whoa, we need to start looking. We see Tesla's  
14 all over the place.

15 Q. Right.

16 A. You don't think twice about it. Now I'm looking at them and  
17 I'm like, because I just don't, you know, I know more, but I  
18 don't, we don't know enough, and I think our guys are very intent  
19 on learning it, it's just we didn't realize, kind of, the  
20 technology. We don't have a particular person that specifically  
21 looks at vehicles all the time, and it's that vehicle specialist  
22 that knows the trends, because you know what they change so fast,  
23 and different manufacturers do different things, so it's like it's  
24 something we need to stay on top of. I will say though, I will  
25 comment that I did find the leased Tesla site that first responder

1 page thing, I did find that really helpful, whether it was the end  
2 all, be all, or need to all the information, I could get it  
3 basically gave me a summary, and said just put a lot of water on  
4 it. And that was a big help initially.

5 Q. Did you notice on the Tesla thing about they have notes about  
6 cribbing out vehicles.

7 A. I noticed afterwards, --

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. -- after we read it, after the scene, that cribbing up, the  
10 idea came from one of our firefighters and honest to God, that  
11 some of the medic unit, that Medic 24, he's just, he's been around  
12 this area forever. He knows everybody and he's just a general,  
13 you know, fix it kind of guy. And he's looking at it and he just  
14 evaluates, and their like, maybe we should, we need to get that  
15 thing up so we can, and that was their idea and after reading it,  
16 I'm like, Perfect.

17 Q. And then when you, when you consulted their website with  
18 their emergency response guide, did that give you, at the time  
19 that you, you know, glanced through their guide and went back to  
20 the operations, did you notice that you had to be careful about  
21 potential reignition or stranded energy issues, or  
22 (indiscernible)?

23 A. I didn't read that comment. I did not get that far into,  
24 because I really was just looking at the time about getting, what  
25 do I need to put on it to make it stop? And that was water,

1 water, water. So then we went there. And then again, like I  
2 said, since then, I've read that whole, that whole informational  
3 booklet they have backwards and forwards and I'm just trying to  
4 make little parts of it stick to my memory, and then I've been  
5 reading the one y'all sent me which is got a lot of the same  
6 information in it, but it, but it's got a lot of a more first-hand  
7 account stuff in it too.

8 Q. Um hmm.

9 A. But it seems to be that that's the stranded energy runaway  
10 stuff, and reignition is the stuff that we wouldn't have ever  
11 thought about beforehand.

12 Q. Yeah.

13 A. I can guarantee, nobody on that scene knew we did not expect  
14 that it sat, I mean, like 45-minutes with nothing and then just  
15 poof out of nowhere, here it comes again. It was, and then it was  
16 violent for, in a little spots, for a few minutes and stuff, but  
17 it was constantly chasing it around and keeping it cooled at that  
18 point. And that's the point when we kind of realized, okay, this  
19 has got to be something, you know, --

20 Q. So you, so after that, so you guys put, you put out the fire,  
21 put a lot of water on it, it, you had it 45-minute or something of  
22 a dormant period and then it reignited and that's when you, you  
23 know, --

24 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

25 Q. That's when you lifted it, yeah.

1 BY DR. BARTH:

2 Q. (Indiscernible) lifted it and put the, put the three-inch  
3 stream on it.

4 A. Yes, sir.

5 Q. After you finished that, did you ever hear of anybody, like  
6 through the, there were no other hissing or popping --

7 A. No, sir, not that I, no sir.

8 Q. Nobody talked about any other stuff, okay.

9 A. No, and there was, I didn't hear anything about after the  
10 fact too, when they towed it off or anything. I mean, as far as I  
11 know, it was done and out and, you know. Knowing what I know now,  
12 it might not be out right now as far as, but, I mean -

13 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

14 Q. No, I think it's good now.

15 A. It's good now?

16 Q. Yeah, we spent plenty of time on it.

17 A. Everybody crawling around looking at it, huh? Is it, I mean,  
18 did it, wait, at the end of y'all's investigation and stuff like  
19 that, will we get some feedback as to, like, anything, what  
20 happened to the car as far as the batteries? Like on some of  
21 these you had some determinations, this cell went, and that's what  
22 caused.

23 DR. BARTH: Yeah, do we want to stop the formal part of the  
24 interview?

25 BY MR. KAMINSKI: Sure.



1 Q. One other thing is, would there be any use of talking to  
2 Roald Hopple?

3 A. Yeah, I mean, if you, if you want to talk to him. I mean  
4 he's --

5 Q. I could do something, maybe do the, is he available tomorrow?  
6 Do you know?

7 A. You might be. I mean, he's on today, I know.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. He's right down the street if you got, you all have --  
10 (indiscernible).

11 Q. He's got another interview at 3:00 so, yeah.

12 A. Oh, okay. Yeah, well we can call him real quick and find out.

13 Q. Okay. Well, let's (indiscernible).

14 BY DR. BARTH:

15 Q. Do you have any questions for us that you want to the  
16 interview?

17 A. Oh, no, no.

18 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

19 Q. And we will be able to get, can you email us a copy of the  
20 report?

21 A. Yes, and I talked to my (indiscernible). It should be  
22 available here. If it's not available now, very shortly. It was  
23 just a couple of finalizing things on it, stuff like that.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. Again, it's kind of weird because there's multiple layers of

1 that because of the, the fatalities, and then we had some exposure  
2 as far as blood born stuff got on some guys when they were moving  
3 and stuff, so trying to link all of these different things  
4 together into one report. I mean.

5 Q. Right.

6 A. I'd like just to end first cause it's so easy.

7 Q. Actually that was a point I want to put on here, so like,  
8 your guys ended up extricating bodies with just bunker gear on,  
9 and that creates a little bit of a mess --

10 A. Yeah. They got some blood and stuff, which we, we're, we're  
11 equipped to handle that, you know. We, every, all of our guys  
12 have a second set of gear, so we have two sets of gear per guys,  
13 and then we have extractors, gear cleaners, there's specialty gear  
14 cleaners that are specialty gear cleaners for these for bunker  
15 gear, to bring them back and do that. We have ways to clean  
16 biohazard and stuff off of us at the scene. Then we'll de-con  
17 again at the station. So it's --

18 Q. So you felt like it was a little annoying, but it's not like  
19 an issue.

20 A. It's not an issue. We don't have the type (indiscernible)  
21 type suits and stuff like that. More involved though, I would of  
22 rather have them have some kind of shield or something on their  
23 face, or something, but we don't have that. But, but yeah, it's  
24 nothing that we, because it if was a car, just a standard car  
25 accident, no fire, no fatality, and you got somebody in there

1 that's actively bleeding or dying, we're crawling in there getting  
2 blood all over us. We always do, so it's like --

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. We're kind of a, it's a by-product, if you will --

5 Q. Yeah.

6 A. -- of the --

7 Q. Okay. That concludes our interview here with Battalion Chief  
8 Rice, and it's approximately 2:13 central time.

9 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

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: FATAL CRASH AND FIRE OF TESLA  
MODEL S IN SPRING, TEXAS,  
ON APRIL 17, 2021  
Interview of Russell Rice

ACCIDENT NO.: HWY21FH007

PLACE: The Woodlands, Harris County, Texas

DATE: April 23, 2021

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

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

\* \* \* \* \*

Investigation of: \*

\*

FATAL CRASH AND FIRE OF TESLA \*

MODEL S IN SPRING, TEXAS, \*

Accident No.: HWY21FH007

ON APRIL 17, 2021 \*

\*

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: ROALD HOPPEL, Lieutenant

The Woodlands Fire Department

Friday,  
April 23, 2021

APPEARANCES:

RONALD KAMINSKI  
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of Roald Hoppel

By Mr. Kaminski

**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

I N T E R V I E W

1  
2 Today's date is April 23, 2021. My name is Ronald Kaminski  
3 with the NTSB and I'll be talking with Roald R-O-A-L-D, Hoppel, H-  
4 O-P-P-E-L. He's a Lieutenant with the Woodlands Fire Department  
5 and he was the initial Incident Commander for the Tesla fire,  
6 which occurred on April 17<sup>th</sup>.

INTERVIEW OF ROALD HOPPEL

7  
8 BY Mr. Kaminski:

9 Q. So, why don't you start with from the time you got the call,  
10 and you went out there, and any issues you had with locating or  
11 getting out there, and what you saw, and what you all did.

12 A. No, we had no delays whatsoever in our response.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. We got through, I mean, for us, we have like little minor  
15 concerns before I came through the Gate from Carlton Woods and  
16 things like that, but that all worked smoothly for us, so. Got on  
17 scene about 30 seconds after Engine 107 and they hadn't  
18 established command, so I did and with that I was Incident Command  
19 for about a minute and a half.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. But before passing it on to Battalion 102, and I got it back  
22 later in the scene, so. But, I mean, the car was fully involved.  
23 We had to knocked down with an inch and three-quarter line. I  
24 think it was the initial attack line. It was knocked down in less  
25 than four minutes. I quickly determined that there were two



1 occupants in the vehicle. Nothing that we could do for them.  
2 There was one in the passenger front, and one the back, which made  
3 us concerned that the driver had, because the entire roof was  
4 already off of the car at this point, so we weren't sure if  
5 possibly the driver had gotten ejected, or whether that was the  
6 driver, or if the driver walked out and left the scene.

7 Q. Right.

8 A. No idea, so we, we started, it was a small, but wooded area,  
9 so we started a search, and it was night, so we started search of  
10 that area. I don't know exactly how many minutes after that the  
11 Constables had located the family, and they confirmed that there  
12 were only two occupants with the vehicle, so that discontinued the  
13 search. When, when we started looking at extricating the victims  
14 in the car, they put it on some stair cribbing, and I think that  
15 aired and kind of started the reignition of the fire, but I  
16 actually was not there for that point. I was just there once the,  
17 I was dealing with the family somewhat and with the police, so I  
18 kind of missed the cribbing.

19 Q. Okay, and what was your involvement with the family and the  
20 police?

21 A. Initially it was to just check on the door, two ladies, the  
22 wives of the victims, and for medical assessment with MCHD Medic  
23 24. And comforting them. They were very distraught. And then  
24 later I was on the opposite side of the accident at the beginning  
25 Hammock Dunes with SO awaiting, or Constable, sorry, awaiting the

1 family members that were coming to help the bereaved family  
2 members.

3 Q. In the woods, there wasn't any issues with the wife? But  
4 they did call then in. There was an ambulance at the -  
5 the wife of

6 A. The wife of the surgeon was complaining of some PVCs and  
7 basically heart flutter, yeah.

8 Q. PVCs is?

9 A. Post Ventricular Contraction or something like that.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. Yeah, basically some kind of like a heart flutter idea, but  
12 she was feeling, and she was assessed by Medic 24 and refused  
13 transport. And then later, when I was on the other end, the  
14 Cypress Creek ambulance showed up and for the same patient, and  
15 that was just miscommunication between the Constable and the on  
16 site --

17 Q. Right.

18 A. -- EMS people.

19 Q. And then, and then, what how about with the police, anything  
20 with the police that you?

21 A. In what regard?

22 Q. Well you said you kind of handled, you talked with

23 A. Well they an issue with letting the family through because  
24 they were considering a hazmat scene which, it was.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. But at the same time, they weren't wearing respirators or air  
2 packs, and we weren't either if we weren't directly involved in  
3 the firefighting operations.

4 Q. Right.

5 A. So to me that was just kind of a little bit tasteless that  
6 they were making it difficult, but we found another way around, I  
7 just wasn't aware of that either.

8 Q. Now there's also, were you around when they loaded up the  
9 vehicle on the flatbed than?

10 A. Yes, sir.

11 Q. Okay. Any issues with that that you would hear any other  
12 popping or --

13 A. No, everything was totally, once we about, once Harris County  
14 Hazmat showed up, which was, I don't remember what time --

15 Q. It was a couple hours I think (Indiscernible)--

16 A. Oh yeah, yeah, several hours. Around at four hours into the  
17 incident I would estimate they said, you know, let's turn the  
18 water off and see if it had cooled sufficiently that we could  
19 remove the victims, because that's what Harris County was  
20 supposedly there for was to help the ME de-con them and so they be  
21 loaded up.

22 Q. Right.

23 A. They did none of that.

24 Q. So how did they de-con them?

25 A. They did not.

- 1 Q. Oh, hey did not.
- 2 A. They did nothing.
- 3 Q. Okay. How did they decide that?
- 4 A. That they would do nothing?
- 5 Q. Yeah.
- 6 A. Just, --
- 7 Q. I mean, an issue they were --
- 8 A. I don't honestly know. At first it was like we were going
- 9 pop the doors out, and then leave it to them, and then we were
- 10 involved in removing the victim, and so, they just did nothing.
- 11 Q. Including the --
- 12 A. I'm sorry, I would say, don't bother with Harris County and
- 13 would have preferred to have had my own hazmat team there from
- 14 Montgomery or from The Woodlands.
- 15 Q. So were, you were, were you part of the water guy that helped
- 16 remove them then, or was there --
- 17 A. No, that was Stravelli. Fryer and Delaney.
- 18 Q. Okay.
- 19 A. And then, kind of Tatem stepped in as well.
- 20 Q. I assume you have like a list of the crew members.
- 21 A. Not yet.
- 22 Q. Okay.
- 23 A. No, we're, they're still working on the report.
- 24 Q. All right.
- 25 A. I was going to say, this is my narrative. You're welcome to

1 it.

2 Q. Oh great. Okay, thank you.

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. And this may answer some other questions I already have, but,  
5 -- okay. Yeah, I know, you kind of came in, you were there in the  
6 very beginning, and then kind of there towards the end, but --

7 A. We had an injury unrelated to the Tesla, to the car.

8 Q. Right, I did about that, and that's when the (Indiscernible)  
9 Chief left. Right, he took him.

10 A. Yeah

11 Q. And but yeah, I know, he had mentioned that you may have been  
12 around when they loaded up the vehicle, so we were just interested  
13 if there any (indiscernible).

14 A. At that point it was not, there was not smoldering anymore,  
15 there was no issue loading it.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. That I was aware of (indiscernible) may be aware of.

18 Q. Do you have any questions for me?

19 A. No.

20 Q. No? Okay. Fair enough. That concludes our interview here  
21 with Lieutenant Hoppel. Am I pronouncing that right?

22 A. Okay enough.

23 Q. Okay, and it's approximately 10 minutes after 3:00.

24 (Whereupon the interview was concluded.)

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD


IN THE MATTER OF: FATAL CRASH AND FIRE OF TESLA  
MODEL S IN SPRING, TEXAS,  
ON APRIL 17, 2021  
Interview of Roald Hoppel

ACCIDENT NO.: HWY21FH007

PLACE: The Woodlands Fire Department

DATE: April 23, 2021

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