

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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DERAILMENT OF CSX TRANSPORTATION
TRAIN K42911 WITH SUBSEQUENT
HAZARDOUS MATERIALS RELEASE
IN DRAFFIN, KENTUCKY,
ON FEBRUARY 13, 2020

Accident No.: RRD20FR002

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Interview of: CHARLES CHILDERS, Deputy Director
Pike County Emergency Management Agency

Accident Scene
Draffin, Kentucky

Friday,
February 14, 2020

APPEARANCES:

PAUL STANCIL, Senior Hazardous Materials Accident
Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

TED TURNER, Investigator
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration

I N D E XITEMPAGE

Interview of Charles Childers:

By Mr. Stancil

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I N T E R V I E W

(3:04 p.m.)

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3 MR. STANCIL: Today is February 14th, 2020; it is 3:04 p.m.
4 We are here in Draffin, Kentucky, where we are interviewing
5 Charles Childers, or C. J. Childers. He is the Deputy Emergency
6 Management Director for Pike County, Kentucky. This is in
7 reference to the CSX train derailment in Daffin, Kentucky -- or
8 Draffin, Kentucky, D-r-a-f-f-i-n. The NTSB number is RRD20FR002.

9 My name is Paul Stancil, Senior Hazmat Accident Investigator,
10 National Transportation Safety Board. So I'll introduce Mr.
11 Childers, and I'll ask you if you would just give us your full
12 name and describe your duties here at Pike County.

13 MR. CHILDERS: Charles Childers, I am the Deputy Emergency
14 Management Director and hazmat technician for Pike County
15 Emergency Management.

INTERVIEW OF CHARLES CHILDERS

BY MR. STANCIL:

17
18 Q. And how long have you been with the agency?

19 A. Twenty-four years.

20 Q. Okay. And what -- just kind of give us a brief description
21 of what your duties here are with the county.

22 A. I do everything from hazmat incidents to search and rescues.
23 I'm the chief drone pilot for Pike County, radio technician for
24 Pike County. I take care of all of the Emergency Services radio
25 system for Pike County.

1 Q. Okay. And so you managed the first response for the county
2 to this accident?

3 A. Yes. It -- me and my boss actually managed it to start with,
4 and then it was turned over to me.

5 Q. Okay. Could you just go through it from the beginning and
6 tell us what happened yesterday?

7 A. My boss called me about 7:00 yesterday morning and told me we
8 had a train derailment with hazmat spill at Draffin. After that,
9 I went ahead, come on in to work, picked the drones up, loaded the
10 drones and truck, all the batteries, chargers, all of the
11 equipment that goes with the drones, and proceeded to meet him up
12 here at the Draffin bridge. That's where we set up our first
13 initial incident command was on the bridge. It was at a safe
14 distance from the actual derailment but in a place where we could
15 run operations at the time.

16 Once we both arrived here, we set up. The two train members
17 were still -- the conductor and the engineer, I'm assuming that's
18 who it was, they were actually on the front of the engine at that
19 time waiting to be rescued. There was a lot of fire around the
20 cars and the engines at that time. We called in swift water
21 rescue teams to come up and do rescue.

22 We had Marrowbone Fire Department and Elkhorn Fire Department
23 on scene, or arriving on scene, about the same time I got here.
24 The case for fire -- well, because it was called in as a fire and
25 everything, so they showed up. But once they showed up, there was

1 no way for them to get to the fire to fight the fire.

2 We did put swift water technicians in upstream of the
3 incident because the chief of that department said -- that was
4 Millard Fire Department actually that come and done that. The
5 chief of that department said he put in upstream that way he
6 doesn't have to fight the current to get down to them, he can get
7 there faster that way.

8 In between the time of him getting the boat in the water,
9 another CSX personnel had come down the tracks on foot from
10 upstream and actually jumped in the water and helped the two guys
11 off the front of the engine. And then the boat rescue team got
12 there, and they picked them up and transported them back up to get
13 on an ambulance.

14 After that -- during this whole process, we done drone
15 flights of the area trying to figure out -- make sure exactly what
16 we're dealing with before some other reps from CSX showed up.
17 At -- initially before some other reps of CSX showed up, we done
18 some flies trying to figure out what we were dealing with. Then I
19 think the first rep from CSX showed up, and he told us what was on
20 the train and everything.

21 After -- once the two gentlemen were removed from the scene,
22 we basically cleared all emergency responders back away from the
23 scene because there was no feasible way to extinguish the fire
24 where it was located -- no safe and feasible way, I should say, to
25 get to it.

1 So we just pulled every -- all of the emergency responders
2 back, staged them out of the way, met with other CSX reps,
3 Department of Highway reps, at that time State Police was here,
4 Kentucky State Fire Marshal's Office was here at that time. And
5 we were all starting our unified command of what needed to be
6 done, what we could do, what we needed to do, what we didn't need
7 to do, getting ready for the onslaught of CSX personnel to show
8 up, you know, and tell us what they needed from us at that point.

9 Because the life safety of the two were out of the way,
10 everything else was just sit back and wait, let it burn. Because
11 in -- from training and past experiences in a hazmat spill like
12 that, it's on fire, it's actually safer to let it burn than it is
13 to try to put it out, because then you have a massive spill to
14 deal with. So if you can't safely put it out and contain it,
15 our -- you would usually in a fire situation like that, we'll let
16 them burn.

17 Q. Okay. Let's go back a little bit to your observations of the
18 train crew. You said you saw the two gentleman on the front of
19 the locomotive. Can you sort of describe more of what was going
20 on there between them and their rescue operations? What was
21 happening there?

22 A. They were on the front of the locomotive, and the fire at
23 that point looked like it was right all the way to the cab of the
24 locomotive. They had swift water below them from the river
25 because it was up due to excessive rainfall, and the fire was

1 right at them. I mean, they were panicking a little bit --

2 Q. Were you --

3 A. -- to say --

4 Q. How close were you to them when this was going on?

5 A. We were still at the Draffin bridge using binoculars, and
6 then we had some fire crews that were actually stationed where
7 we're at here now that could see them over there and stuff.

8 Q. Were you able to see them directly?

9 A. I seen them one time directly in the midst of my running
10 around.

11 Q. Okay. So you had mentioned earlier when we spoke about like
12 a fireball eruption or some -- a pop that occurred. Can you tell
13 us about that?

14 A. Right. After -- there was two of those actually. One while
15 I was down on the bridge, there was one, and it happened while
16 there was an extreme fire around the engines and everything. It
17 happened and had a massive fire develop right there. It wasn't
18 like a big mushroom cloud or anything, it was just a big massive
19 fire right on top of the engine and tanks -- tank cars.

20 Q. And was this before the train crew escaped or after?

21 A. There was a massive fire right there before the train crew
22 escaped. And the first one was actually while they were still on
23 the engine. The second one was after they had been removed from
24 the scene. We had actually pulled all of our people back by this
25 point and staged them around the area so -- more the scene

1 security, doing some evacuation of some homes just for safety --
2 just to be on the safe side. Everything -- because we were
3 worried that the one train car that was sitting on the rails still
4 was taking a lot of heat from that fire.

5 We were concerned that it could rupture and possibly explode.
6 And then if it exploded, would there be a chain reaction, assuming
7 the whole train was tank cars with that. Would there be a whole
8 chain reaction of that fact? So because of that, we elected to
9 evacuate the surrounding area right around where the train
10 actually was. On -- even on downstream from where the accident
11 was, because the train cars went by those places. And we was
12 afraid if it started at one end it would be like a domino effect,
13 and we were just erring on the side of safety on that.

14 So -- now when the second pop, we were -- I was actually
15 standing here across from the accident. And it was just huge. It
16 was a pop, sounded like a jet engine rushing, and a huge fireball
17 went up at -- right around there, and it burnt real big there for
18 15, 20, 30 minutes, something like that, before it started dying
19 down. Now once the fireball died down and everything, the big
20 fire was gone, there was still a large -- sounded like a jet
21 engine sound.

22 And the upper end of the car that's laying this way that's
23 burnt -- laid up and down the river bank that burnt, the upper end
24 of it where the engine is sitting, and you got the two cars
25 sitting here on the engine, something like this, down on the

1 ground you could see forced air. It looked like a blow torch
2 blowing out of the bottom of that tank, or the side of that tank,
3 or -- it was at the bottom next to the ground, but I'm assuming
4 it's the side of the tank.

5 Q. So that's up close to where the locomotive was?

6 A. That's up close to where the locomotive impacted the tank.

7 Q. Right. So was the first pop or the second pop -- which one
8 was worse?

9 A. I'm going to say they were about the same.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. I'm going to say they were about the same. The first one, if
12 I'd been up here -- I was at the bridge when the first one
13 happened. So the second one I was up here -- the second one, I
14 was a little closer to it than when the first one went off. So
15 I'm going to say they were probably about the same given my
16 distance from one to the other one.

17 Q. So were you able to see how close the train crew was when --
18 so they were there for the first pop, but not the second pop?

19 A. They were there for the first, but not the second.

20 Q. Okay. So how close were the train crew to the flames or to
21 the event that was going on there with the pops?

22 A. The flames from the train crew? I'm going to say the flames
23 was getting probably within 10 feet of the train crew.

24 Q. Okay. What was --

25 A. Give or take a little.

1 Q. And was that hampering their ability to get out of the area?

2 A. Yes. Because they would -- they could not jump. It was jump
3 into the swift water, or go back toward the fire. They -- I mean,
4 that's -- there was their choices. They didn't have much of a
5 choice other than that.

6 Q. Okay. So let's talk about -- a little bit more about how
7 the -- how they were rescued. What exactly happened?

8 A. One -- another gentleman from CSX took a vehicle and went up
9 to -- upstream here from the accident to a crossing and on foot
10 ran down the tracks. He got down almost to where the buffer car
11 was and went over the riverbank to the river, jumped in the river,
12 slammed down to a tree, talked the guys into jumping into the
13 water, and he helped rescue them and pull them to the shore, which
14 is -- that's about the time the boat team got down there and
15 actually started getting them in the boat and everything.

16 Q. And where did the boat bring them to?

17 A. The boat took them back upstream to where that crossing is,
18 because there's a low water bridge, that's where the boat put in.
19 They took them back upstream to there, and that's where an
20 ambulance picked them up and transported them to Pikeville Medical
21 Center.

22 Q. Okay. So there was an evacuation?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Can you tell us about the evacuation?

25 A. Like what the -- it was an evacuation, it was -- we sent the

1 State Police because we had several State Police up here at the
2 time and Pike County Sherriff's Department. We sent them around
3 to the area straight across the river adjacent from the derailment
4 and downstream from the derailment where the trail was actually
5 near the houses -- it was just a safety precaution -- and advised
6 those people to evacuate. And they were evacuated for probably 2,
7 2½ hours, something like that before we actually --

8 Q. You --

9 A. -- told everybody it was -- they were -- we felt that at that
10 point the fire had died down. It was just small little fires
11 burning, the other tank car was not -- we used a thermal engine
12 camera on a drone to get some temperatures of the tank cars and
13 stuff after about 2½ hours to make sure that it was still red-hot
14 and everything.

15 Q. And so when did the evacuation commence?

16 A. 7:30-ish, give or take.

17 Q. And what time did it end?

18 A. About 10:00, give or take.

19 Q. Okay. And what prompted the terminating the evacuation?

20 A. After we flew a drone over with a thermal imaging camera and
21 was looking at the scene, the cars that remained on the track, we
22 used a thermal imaging camera to check the temperature of those
23 cars. And once we -- I think the endcap of the car by that time
24 was down to about 165 degrees, I think is what the thermal imaging
25 camera showed.

1 And at that point, we felt that 165 degrees was safe, the car
2 was in no danger of the -- heat rupturing and causing an
3 explosion. So after that, we considered the rest of the cars
4 safe, and -- because there was no other damage to the rest of the
5 train.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. So after that we were like, yeah, everybody can return to
8 their homes. If you want to go back home, we're not going to keep
9 you out any longer than that.

10 Q. Okay. And what was the highest temperature noticed in the --

11 A. I don't know.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Because the display -- the numbers on the display was white
14 on the camera, and it was so hot, it was in the white into the
15 center, and I couldn't read it.

16 Q. Okay. All right. Let's go back just to capture the timing.
17 So when was -- when were you first notified of the incident?

18 A. My supervisor called me at 7:00.

19 Q. And what time did you get here?

20 A. 7:15, 7:20.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. Something like that, by the time I went and picked up the
23 drones and everything and loaded everything in the truck and got
24 here.

25 Q. And what time was the train crew rescued?

1 A. Probably somewhere between 7:30, 15 till 8:00 probably, give
2 or take. That's a guesstimate.

3 Q. Okay. Now from Pike County, you mentioned a number of fire
4 departments who responded. Do you have the numbers in terms of --

5 A. Yes. There was -- I don't know exactly how many members we
6 had here, but there were four fire departments and one technical
7 rescue squad that we had actually deployed.

8 Q. Do you know what towns they were from?

9 A. It was Marrowbone Fire Department.

10 Q. Marbon?

11 A. M-a-r-r -- or, M -- Marrowbone, M-a-r-r-b-o-n-e [sic].

12 Q. Okay, Marrowbone. Okay.

13 A. Elkhorn City Fire Department, Pikeville City Fire Department,
14 they brought an air boat up, Millard Fire Department, they've got
15 a swift water rescue and dive team. They responded in the boat to
16 actually have done the rescue of the guys. And then our Pike
17 County Technical Rescue team, and they're stationed out of Belfry.
18 They -- which is a pretty good haul. They showed up, but by the
19 time they got here, we didn't need them. So we sent them back.

20 Q. Okay. All-in-all total, how many firefighters were on scene?

21 A. No, I have no idea.

22 Q. Okay. All right. Did you have access to a hazmat team?

23 A. Just our hazmat that -- my -- just Pike County Emergency
24 Management and their hazmat. Me and a few other guys from --

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. -- Pike County Hazmat.

2 Q. Okay. And you said -- you mentioned you had spoken to
3 someone at CSX, and they provided you information about what was
4 on the train.

5 A. Yes. I do --

6 Q. Can you tell us about how that worked out?

7 A. He showed up and pulls up and said, do you know what's on
8 that train? He pulled in -- we were stationed on the bridge, and
9 he pulled in and said, you all do know what's on that train,
10 right? And told us what was on it and everything. And then -- I
11 don't even know who he was.

12 Q. But he was with CSX?

13 A. He was. He was in a CSX truck and CSX uniform, so I'm
14 assuming he was with CSX.

15 Q. Okay. So they -- he told you what was on the train?

16 A. Right.

17 Q. What -- and what did he say?

18 A. He said it was ethanol. He said it was a train loaded with
19 ethanol on the train.

20 Q. Okay. Any guidance as to what you should do about it?

21 A. Stay away from it.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. Said -- and he said he did have hazmat people from CSX and
24 safety people from CSX and a lot of different people from CSX in
25 route, but he did not have an ETA of what time they would be here.

1 Q. Did you ask for, or did they supply you with, any paperwork
2 as to what was on the train?

3 A. That would have been my boss that was dealing with him,
4 because I think I was preparing to fly a drone at that time.

5 Q. Oh, okay.

6 A. So my boss dealt with him. So I don't know.

7 Q. Okay. And who is your boss?

8 A. Doug Tackett.

9 Q. Doug Tackett. And what's his position?

10 A. He is the Emergency Management Director for the county.

11 Q. And you're the Deputy --

12 A. I'm the Deputy Director.

13 Q. Okay. Did -- do you know if he interfaced with anyone at
14 CSX? Do -- you know, giving hazard communications or, you know,
15 this is what you should be doing, or what you shouldn't be doing?

16 A. I have no idea.

17 MR. STANCIL: You wouldn't know? Okay.

18 All right. Ted, do you have any questions?

19 MR. TURNER: No.

20 MR. STANCIL: Okay.

21 BY MR. STANCIL:

22 Q. Anything else that you can think of that sticks out in your
23 mind?

24 A. Once they were cleared -- once the engineer and the conductor
25 were cleared of the scene and in route to the hospital, like I

1 said, our biggest thing after that was scene security. Pull
2 everybody back away from the scene, and we did some drone flights.
3 You know, drones are expendable, people are not. So we like to
4 use drones to go and get a scene size-up type deal if we -- if at
5 all possible, so we sent the drone in a few times to look around
6 and stuff.

7 But other than that, we just pulled everybody back and done
8 scene safety and scene security, make sure everybody left
9 everything alone and waiting on CSX personnel to get here and
10 direct us on what they needed and what they needed us to do, or
11 did they need us to stay, didn't need us to stay, what we
12 needed -- what they needed from us at that point.

13 Q. Was there anything that you identified thinking about this
14 since it happened yesterday? You know, any shortcomings in the
15 response? Any issues, the safety issues you think need to be
16 addressed? Or have you given it much thought yet?

17 A. I really haven't got that far yet.

18 Q. Okay. Do -- are you all planning to do a hotwash or a
19 lessons learned meeting or anything?

20 A. Usually me and my boss will sit down and talk about it after
21 the incident's all done and our phase of it is done. He'll sit
22 and wanting to know what we could have done better, what we could
23 have -- you know?

24 Q. Yeah. Anything come to mind just yet?

25 A. Yes. Do not launch a drone off that bridge.

1 Q. So you had a little mishap with a drone?

2 A. Yes. There was too much metal on that bridge. It messed
3 with its onboard compass and everything, and that drone was -- is
4 not flyable anymore.

5 Q. Okay. All right. So in terms of the community, no injuries?

6 A. Not to my knowledge. We had no injuries in the community.
7 The community was actually really, really calm about it. They --
8 you know, nobody really gave us any trouble on anything, and we
9 knocked on doors and went door-to-door getting them to evacuate
10 the area and told them what was wrong.

11 Everybody already knew it was on fire, and they were like, no
12 problem. Everybody got out and left, and I'm not sure where they
13 all went. They -- I think they opened a community center up at
14 Elkhorn if people wanted to go there, but they didn't mandatory
15 make them go there. They just -- it was open for --

16 Q. Do you know if anyone took advantage of that?

17 A. I don't have no idea.

18 Q. Okay. And I also heard that there were concerns about water
19 supplies on the creek here.

20 A. There were. Because of the incident -- as I was responding,
21 I could smell diesel fuel at -- probably almost at the water
22 intake for Mountain Water's water supply. I could -- at that
23 point, with the windows up on this truck, I could smell the diesel
24 fuel.

25 So I radioed our 911 dispatch and asked them to get in

1 contact with Mountain Water and tell them that they do have a
2 diesel fuel plume headed toward their fresh water intake. And
3 after that, our 911 dispatch contacted them, and I'm assuming they
4 shut down their intake. Because by that evening, we had a
5 representative here from the City of Pikeville.

6 Mountain Water and the City of Pikeville sell water to each
7 other all the time back and forth. Their pipings are connected
8 together; they sell water to each other. So the City of Pikeville
9 started producing and selling all of the water to Mountain Water
10 to cover this area because that water plant was shut down.

11 The -- had the Department of Environmental Protection on
12 scene by later that day, and they were pulling water samples to
13 check and see if it was going to be safe to open the water plant
14 back up. Because at one point the plume had made it far enough
15 downstream that Pikeville City water plant had shut down their
16 water plant just for the safety precaution until everything's got
17 tested and it was approved to open or close -- leave -- or leave
18 closed or open it back up.

19 Once the representative from Pikeville City said that they
20 were basically getting bled dry, and they still had fire
21 protection for the city and Pikeville Medical Center, the
22 hospital, to worry about. By -- so they said if they did not have
23 a determination from the Department of Environmental Protection by
24 5:00 that -- yesterday evening, they were going to shut the water
25 off to Mountain Water at that point. Because they would've

1 been -- they would be into their redline area where they would
2 have just enough water to provide for the city of Pikeville.
3 Because they were using it out of reserves.

4 Luckily 3:00, 4:00, somewhere around through there I think,
5 and don't quote me on that time, but I think around 3:00 or 4:00,
6 Department of Environmental Protection actually give the approval
7 for Pikeville City to start producing water again out of their
8 water plant, and then give -- right shortly thereafter that, they
9 give Mountain Water the go-ahead to go ahead and open their plant
10 back up and start producing water again.

11 So we did not have a water outage where people were without
12 water. We were concerned that we were going to, so we were trying
13 to make some preparations for that, but things worked out and we
14 didn't have it.

15 Q. Great. Were there any other impacts to the community at all?

16 A. Not that I know of.

17 MR. STANCIL: All right, sir. Well, I appreciate it very,
18 very much. If you have any additional information, you know how
19 to contact us. And we appreciate your time and --

20 MR. CHILDERS: You're very welcome.

21 MR. STANCIL: -- your expertise. And thank you very much.
22 And at this point, it is 3:30, and we'll terminate the interview.
23 Thank you.

24 MR. CHILDERS: You're very welcome.

25 (Whereupon, at 3:38 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: DERAILMENT OF CSX TRANSPORTATION
 TRAIN K42911 WITH SUBSEQUENT
 HAZARDOUS MATERIALS RELEASE
 IN DRAFFIN, KENTUCKY,
 ON FEBRUARY 13, 2020
 Interview of Charles Childers

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD20FR002

PLACE: Draffin, Kentucky

DATE: February 14, 2020

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.



Christy Wilson
Transcriber