

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

NATURAL GAS-FUELED EXPLOSION OF *
RESIDENCE, DALLAS, TEXAS *
FEBRUARY 23, 2018 *

* Accident No.: PLD18FR002

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Interview of: BOBBIE BAKER, Hazmat Coordinator
Dallas Fire-Rescue

Walnut Hill Recreation Center
Dallas, Texas

Tuesday,
February 27, 2018

APPEARANCES:

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STEPHEN JENNER, Ph.D., Human Performance Investigator
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I N T E R V I E W

(8:28 a.m.)

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2
3 MS. GUNARATNAM: Good morning. My name is Rachael Gunaratnam
4 and I am an investigator with the NTSB, National Transportation
5 Safety Board. Today is February 27, 2018, and the time is 8:28
6 a.m. We are currently at the Walnut Hill Rec Center in Dallas,
7 Texas, and we are here to investigate the house explosion on
8 Espanola Drive in Dallas that occurred on Friday, February 23rd,
9 2018.

10 In this interview, we will be talking to Captain Baker. I
11 would like to first go around the room and introduce ourselves.
12 Again, please spell your name and provide your title.

13 So I am Rachael Gunaratnam, R-A-C-H-A-E-L, G-U-N-A-R-A-T-N-A-
14 M, hazmat investigator.

15 DR. JENNER: I'm Stephen Jenner, S-T-E-P-H-E-N, J-E-N-N-E-R,
16 a human performance investigator with the NTSB.

17 MR. COLLINS: Jim Collins, J-I-M, C-O-L-L-I-N-S, regional
18 manager for the Railroad Commission of Texas.

19 MR. PADGETT: Ted Padgett, Chief of Staff, Dallas Fire-
20 Rescue, T-E-D, P-A-D-G-E-T-T.

21 MS. COLLETTI: Alex Colletti, PHMSA Accident Investigation,
22 A-L-E-X, C-O-L-L-E-T-T-I.

23 MR. MURDOCK: Phillip Murdock, Director of Engineering and
24 Compliance, Atmos Energy, P-H-I-L-L-I-P, M-U-R-D-O-C-K.

25 MR. CHEVEREZ: Jose Cheverez, Railroad Commission of Texas,

1 J-O-S-E, C-H-E-V-E-R-E-Z.

2 MR. BAKER: Captain Bobby Baker, Dallas Fire-Rescue, hazmat
3 coordinator, B-O-B-B-Y, B-A-K-E-R.

4 INTERVIEW OF CAPT. BOBBIE BAKER

5 BY MS. GUNARATNAM:

6 Q. Okay. Thank you. So we'll just, I'll start off with asking
7 you, can you tell us about yourself, your background with your
8 job?

9 A. Sure.

10 Q. Yeah.

11 A. I'll be a 20-year veteran May the 4th, so getting close to
12 that with Dallas Fire-Rescue. I've been the hazmat coordinator
13 since February 2017. I've been a captain since October 2007. I
14 live in the city of Dallas, married with one child. I have a
15 degree, a bachelor's degree, and that's -- what else?

16 Q. That's great. You were hazmat coordinator for how long?

17 A. I've been, about a year now.

18 Q. A year, oh, okay. Great. So tell us what -- were you there
19 on Friday?

20 A. Yes, ma'am.

21 Q. On Espanola?

22 A. I was there, not on the initial response, we were there after
23 the events took place. So I would say we arrived about, I think
24 the timeline -- and I'm going off the cuff here. I'm going to
25 guess about 8:50 in the morning. So, I guess, approximately 2

1 hours after the initial call. I believe it was 0654.

2 And we were assigned to the elementary school to help
3 evacuate that elementary school, which was not in the initial
4 vicinity at the time, but it was told to us there was a
5 precautionary evacuation that they wanted to do which led to other
6 questions. So we started that process.

7 I think there was 740 kids that we evacuated there. Just for
8 the record, we found no readings inside the school above zero
9 percent LEL, 20.902 in all areas, boiler rooms, every area was
10 checked. Meter service assembly was checked outside, nothing
11 there. Out buildings were checked, which they did not have any
12 gas feeds to those out buildings, but we checked, to do due
13 diligence and nothing was found.

14 Q. What equipment did you use?

15 A. Sensit Gold G2, Combustible Gas Indicators, and MultiRAE's
16 PID -- Photoionization Detector, sorry. I know people get a
17 little wiggled with the acronym, so --

18 Q. Yeah, thank you.

19 A. Sure.

20 Q. Do you carry those with you, usually?

21 A. On the hazmat rig, yes ma'am. It's a primary deal. We
22 brought some additional resources with us, just in case. We
23 didn't know exactly what the parameters, or what the -- how big
24 the scale of the incident was at the time. We just heard, you
25 know, that it was an explosion.

1 I was in my office that morning. I got to work about 5:00
2 a.m. that morning. When the initial -- we have a scanner in our
3 office, and my lieutenant and I were having casual conversation,
4 and I heard the initial box come in. When I heard their initial
5 reports come out, there was no burns or no smoke, but it looked as
6 if there was an explosion, it immediately caught my attention.
7 And started listening, and that led to the process. I will say, I
8 wish we'd a been on the initial response, but we weren't. It's
9 not for me to -- you know, I can't self-dispatch.

10 Q. Right, yeah.

11 A. So, or we would a went straight then, but it was obvious what
12 was going on. What I didn't realize was the previous events that
13 led up to that. My lieutenant was the one that brought it to my
14 attention that they had had an incident the previous day in that
15 same area. And the reason he knew that, he used to be stationed
16 in this area, so he knew the streets. And so we're starting to
17 put two and two together with those two events. We started
18 surmising, hey, look, there's a high likelihood these are related.

19 We didn't know about the Wednesday incident though. And so -
20 - that's kind of how we started out.

21 Q. Okay. So you went to the school, you checked the gas
22 readings there. What time -- you said you arrived around 8:50 at
23 the school?

24 A. Yes, ma'am.

25 Q. So what was the name of the school?

1 A. Well we actually arrived at the command post at 8:50.

2 Q. Okay. Command post then, then was sent out.

3 A. Yes, ma'am. And then was sent to the school, yes. And the
4 incident commanders, I believe it was Battalion 7 and Battalion 9
5 was at the command post. And we didn't have direct sight, where
6 they were at, of the actual Espanola address there. I believe
7 they were staged at -- I want to get this right. It was on the
8 corner of the block of Espanola and, I forget the cross street --
9 was what?

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Larga.

11 MR. BAKER: Larga, that's it. Yep, Larga. So that's where
12 they were at. That's where we reported to and started asking
13 questions and asked specifically, you know, what's the game plan?
14 And the Atmos representative -- so let me back up. En route, I
15 was called by one of the Atmos representatives who -- we had just
16 had natural gas -- so we have a CE every month with hazmat to keep
17 up our continued education hours. We do --

18 BY MS. GUNARATNAM:

19 Q. Okay, continuing education.

20 A. We require 20 hours a year in our program, and so we had just
21 had continued education with Atmos at their facility in Bueno in
22 January. So with this, this is -- this was fresh off that, so the
23 relationships are fresh, people know each other.

24 So Mr. Slaughter, Kyle Slaughter from Atmos, he called me on
25 the phone and said, hey, just to let you know, are you en route

1 there? I said, yes, sir, I am. He said we're going to do a
2 preliminary precautionary evacuation of the school. And so,=
3 that's when we went to the command post and they said, hey, you're
4 going to go to the school and start this evacuation. Which at the
5 time I didn't have all the information of why. I just assumed
6 that we had a problem with service there also. Come to find out,
7 we didn't have a problem with the service at the school.

8 So we made that very clear at the school with the
9 administration, the principal, and, you know, I told him, I said,
10 listen, I can't give you any scientific facts here. Quantitative
11 testing tells us that we need to evacuate these kids, but if
12 that's what they want to do, we were told we're going to support
13 them in that decision. So that's what we did.

14 Q. So, okay, so when did you finish up at the school?

15 A. It was about 10 to 12. Right at lunch, I think's when the,
16 about the final bus was pulled out. Because when we started the
17 initial process, it was like 10:00 by the time we got the game
18 plan together. Because the initial evacuation plan was to walk
19 the kids. Well, it was raining and cold, and I just advised them,
20 it's probably not the best PR move, so let's get buses over here,
21 and that's what they did. And I think they took them to two
22 different locations and they allowed parents to come pick them up
23 if they could prove --

24 And full accountability with the kids was done. The teachers
25 did a great job and DISD did a, you know, did a good job. Their

1 drills payed off. So that's what I told them. So --

2 Q. What DSID?

3 A. DISD, Dallas Independent School District.

4 Q. Oh, okay.

5 A. Yes, ma'am. -- And I believe it was Thomas Jefferson High
6 School is the actual point they were going to go to. That was the
7 main place that we were told they were going to evacuate the kids
8 to as part of their plan.

9 Q. I'm sorry, what was the name of the elementary school?

10 A. Hold on, I'll have to see. Just a second. I know it's here.
11 I apologize if I'm a little fuzzy. I'm trying -- I'm running on
12 about 2 hours of sleep, so I -- okay, let's see here --

13 Q. That's okay.

14 A. You can ask me something else while I'm trying to find to
15 find that and give it to you.

16 Q. Yeah. Did you -- was that the end of your shift then, or
17 what, did you continue helping with the evacuation afterwards?

18 A. No, that was pretty much at the end of that evacuation. I
19 left there and went to the staging area of the command post set up
20 with Atmos, and I believe it was in that same vicinity where we're
21 at now. And I don't remember the address there, but kind of
22 waiting for what the plan was from the incident commander next.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. And so, we stood by and we were told that -- they came over
25 and they had a pow wow, a little debriefing of the incident, and

1 they asked if we could escort some investigators into the incident
2 scene. I didn't realize at the time, those investigators were a
3 third-party investigation team from Atmos. I didn't know that
4 until we got over there. And what led me to that is the guy's
5 name was Baker. My name is Baker, so it started a conversation
6 and, you know, I did have some concerns as to -- we knew that the
7 Railroad Commission -- I believe that's where I first made contact
8 with you guys, and I gave them my card. We knew that you guys
9 were coming. We originally were told they were coming out of
10 Oklahoma City and would be there in a couple hours. That was the
11 original, what we were told.

12 Q. Um-hum.

13 A. So, once that went down, we were released from the scene and,
14 of course, not being the incident commander, we didn't have
15 jurisdiction to secure the scene or hold anything there. So
16 that's usually typically up to the IC's themselves. And I was
17 told that the arson investigator had already come and went.

18 But looking at it, when I first got to the Espanola address,
19 the first thing you notice was there was no burn patterns, no
20 signs of an initial combustion process. Obviously, there was
21 signs of structural damage. And that's when I asked where they
22 found the little girl. And when they kind of said, I think the
23 alpha delta corner, and we just, you know, we talked about -- my
24 theory was that in that morning when they got up, it was breakfast
25 time, she probably hit the light switch, and where she was at, the

1 overpressure is, is what I thought would kill -- what looked like
2 killed her.

3 Come to find out, the ME has said that she's had hemorrhaging
4 inside. She had no scars or anything on the outside of the body,
5 so I think everybody else was pretty much shielded inside the room
6 itself. But I did ask the -- I believe the guy was a mechanical
7 engineer, and I'd asked him had he ever seen anything like this?
8 And he said it was very unusual, but he had seen stuff like this.

9 Once we left, later that afternoon, I got a phone call from
10 the gentleman, asking me who was responsible for the evidence
11 collection or stuff inside the residence itself. And I said, I'll
12 call you back; I have go find out from Battalion 9. So I called
13 Battalion 9 on scene. And the reason he had asked is because they
14 had noticed there was a security system on the outside of the
15 house, and they wanted to see if they could get the two servers
16 that they could observe from outside on the street, that possible
17 had where they could, you know, forensically take that evidence
18 off there to look at the actual video of the house exploding
19 itself. That's what they wanted to do. I turned it over to
20 Battalion 9. I'm not sure what happened after that, or where that
21 process is.

22 That evening, I was at home and listening to the scanner
23 again. I heard more evacuations, so I called the incident
24 commander back and said, do you need our help? I hear there's
25 more evacuations. He said, stand by; we'll call you back if we

1 need you. And so, I never received another call. So --

2 The next thing I heard was Sunday afternoon, when you
3 contacted me about having a meeting.

4 Q. So after you were finished walking BakerRisk around, you were
5 done with that and you went home?

6 A. Yes, ma'am.

7 Q. Okay. And what time what was the time frame for walking them
8 around? Do you remember?

9 A. It was probably around 1330 hours.

10 Q. Okay. And so, let's go back to that. When you -- so you
11 approached the house, you drove and parked in front of the house?

12 A. Yep.

13 Q. Okay, and did you guys do a perimeter walk?

14 A. No. You couldn't do a perimeter walk because of the -- it
15 was a fence on the Bravo side, and you couldn't walk on the
16 Charlie side, so we couldn't do a perimeter walk.

17 Q. Okay. So what exactly did you observe?

18 A. I observed from the Alpha side, it looked like to me the
19 bricks were obviously pushed out. Looked like pier and beam home.
20 I actually took some photos, and I have those photos if you want
21 them.

22 Q. Yeah, we do.

23 A. Okay.

24 Q. Thank you.

25 A. And took photos from a lot of angles. And the reason I did

1 that is, one, from a hazmat perspective where we can go back and
2 look at it and talk about it. And just in case.

3 Q. Um-hum.

4 A. So, took a picture from the Alpha-Bravo corner to where we
5 could get to. And then from the Alpha, or sorry, from the Alpha-
6 Delta corner and the Alpha-Bravo corner out front. And that's as
7 far as we could go.

8 We couldn't, you know, we couldn't make way, and we didn't
9 even try. So I knew that you guys were coming, I was like, no,
10 we're not -- we understand evidence. Our team, we do a lot of --
11 we're all certified in the 12-step process with the FBI, so we do
12 all the biological sampling, we do a lot of processing for
13 evidence. So we understand that. So it's not foreign to us in
14 the hazmat team.

15 Q. Did you notice anything in your walk-through unusual? Or
16 like any indications of something?

17 A. No, ma'am, I didn't. You know, it looked like it was a
18 fairly new home. I've come to understand now that it was
19 remodeled recently. It was truss construction in the roof. It
20 would appear to me that, just looking at it, that the initial --
21 and it looked like a utility closet in the hallway where I could
22 see, and I, of course, you couldn't see a hot water heater or
23 anything like that. And just looking at it, I would guess to say,
24 it looked like it pushed it that way, from the Alpha, would be the
25 Alpha-Bravo through the Charlie-Delta, the way it's expanded, just

1 from the blind eye. No forensic tests or anything to quantitate
2 to that, but that's what it looked like. And then the bricks were
3 pushed out.

4 Q. Were there -- were any measurements taken or anything like
5 that?

6 A. No. Not from me.

7 Q. Right. Well, BakerRisk, did they take any?

8 A. I'm not sure because I left.

9 Q. Oh, okay, and they stayed?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Okay. All right.

12 (Interruption at the door.)

13 BY MS. GUNARATNAM:

14 Q. Sorry. We're continuing the interview.

15 Okay, so you --

16 A. And the reason I left, just to clarify that, is that it was
17 presented to me that the scene had been -- they were allowing them
18 to come in the scene. I mean, I, like I said, I wasn't the
19 incident commander, so I didn't have control of that. I was asked
20 to escort them in there and that's what I did.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. And so, I asked, do you need me for anything else? He said,
23 no sir, we don't; if we need anything we'll call you. Roger that.
24 So, we left.

25 Q. So you left at?

1 A. It was around 2.

2 Q. Two.

3 A. Let's see. I don't think I wrote that down for sure.

4 Q. That's fine. So you left but BakerRisk continued, stayed on.

5 A. Yeah, right. Correct.

6 Q. Okay. So I'd just like to go back to your continuing
7 education with Atmos.

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. What kind of things did you learn in that training?

10 A. So the continuing education was primarily started out as a
11 PowerPoint over the CGI, Combustible Gas Indicator, Sensit Gold
12 G2. We went through that talking about LEL and scaling up to
13 total gas, the different sensors on the CGI. We talked about, you
14 know, levels of what we call evacuation levels, 10 percent LEL is
15 what we use for evacuation, and understanding what that means
16 total. Obviously that's a lot less than the total gas.

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. And so, as it's a wide range, we use that for safety factor.
19 We talked about explosive range, of being 5 to 15 percent with the
20 methane. And then, at the end, we had one of our lieutenants
21 that's senior there, give a overview of unknowns.

22 So how we quantify, typically what you get is, you know, a CO
23 call. And we've talked about this a lot in the department. We
24 get a lot of CO calls that typically people are like, oh, that's
25 just CO. But because of the different cross-sensitives in those

1 gases, we're trying to get people to understand that it may not
2 just be CO. That's just a -- just get's us in the ball park with
3 a ticket. Now we have to figure out what the seat is. And so, we
4 talked about that. And the Atmos people were there actually, and
5 actually listened to that, too, and stood on that. So it was a
6 great CE. Really talking about colorimetric tubes and using those
7 to quantify what we have. And we talked about the 20 to 30
8 percent correction factors there, you know, on those, so -- it was
9 a great CE. And we typically do that 3 days in a row
10 because we have a A, B, and C shift.

11 Q. Um-hum.

12 A. So, they -- all three shifts get the same class. And then,
13 that was pretty much it.

14 Q. Who of your staff went? Attended?

15 A. So I can get those records for you if you need them. It was
16 a lot, I mean, it's -- we have about -- right now I have about 52
17 technicians in the program. And so we have a primary hazmat
18 station, Station 3. That's the primary hazmat team, and then we
19 have what we call the -- we call it the bench program. I don't
20 like that word. I call it clazmat program, because I don't
21 delineate between the qualifications for those people as much as I
22 do the primary team. They have the same quals as we do, and we're
23 -- they're required to attend those CEs. We had a great
24 attendance for that CE.

25 And so, I can get you all those names, but all of the

1 officers on all three shifts were there, myself, Lieutenant
2 Thomason, my lieutenant with us in staff in hazmat.

3 Q. It's all hazmat?

4 A. Yes, ma'am. It's just hazmat.

5 Q. Right.

6 A. Yeah, it's just hazmat. And some plain old hazmatters, were
7 there are too, because these are our back-up team, it's a northern
8 suburb, so we try to reach out to them more and include them on
9 the training also.

10 Q. All right. Do you do that annually? How often do you do the
11 CE?

12 A. We do that CE annually, yes, ma'am.

13 Q. Annually. Okay. And that's an Atmos, you always do it with
14 Atmos?

15 A. No. We don't always do it with Atmos. They have done it
16 with Atmos in the past, and I don't -- I'm not sure, for the
17 record, when that last time they went to Atmos. I think it was
18 just a couple a years ago.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. But Atmos actually reached out to us, and said, hey, we'd
21 like to invite you to our training facilities. Sure. And so, we
22 set that up. We came up there in January.

23 MS. GUNARATNAM: Okay. All I have for now, I'll just pass it
24 off to my right.

25 BY DR. JENNER:

1 Q. All right. Thank you. This is Steve Jenner with the NTSB.
2 Great. Thank you for your story so far. Just a couple things I
3 want to follow up on.

4 You made the comment, you wish you were part of the initial
5 response. Can you explain that?

6 A. Yes. So obviously we know, you know, there's a distinct
7 delineation between the operations and the hazmat operations, and
8 the way we run our program in Dallas, we're essentially an ad hoc.
9 So special operations is an ad hoc to regular operations. And so,
10 our company is an engine, a truck and an ambulance that does
11 normal fire duty. When a hazmat run comes in, we transfer over
12 and become a hazmat unit.

13 Now obviously, the training never leaves you. I say we're
14 always hazmat, right? But as being assigned as a hazmat unit, and
15 being dedicated to that incident, that's how we operate. We're
16 looking at those response models as we speak, from the resiliency
17 standpoint, and those are constant discussions to try to have them
18 make that better, especially with the city the size of Dallas.

19 Personally, I think we should be a dedicated unit in a city
20 this size. And we're working on that. But I don't make that
21 call. I just try to influence it with a lot of good data.
22 Unfortunately, calls like this can come back and I'll say that,
23 for the record, that I can't quantitatively say that we could have
24 saved that girl. But I think with the totality of the
25 circumstances on Wednesday and Thursday, that we could at least

1 made a big part of the puzzle to put it together, that, I would at
2 least like to say, that we could have been monitoring the previous
3 days and had a baseline of what we were dealing with.

4 And then, Thursday night, you know, had -- I can't say what
5 the build-up was, I don't -- you know, and I'm not, I can't
6 quantitatively say that we could of done that, but I can say that
7 looking back on it, I'd a like to have been there earlier.

8 Q. Okay. Or continuing with that, you had mentioned that you,
9 you were familiar with one of the two previous house incidents,
10 but only one of the two.

11 A. Yes, sir, the Thursday incident.

12 Q. What -- is there a mechanism for information to get
13 communicated where you are aware of things?

14 A. Formally -- so typically the way it works, if we have a CO or
15 a typical natural gas call in that area, if it's over 35 parts per
16 million, there is a policy that the company would make notation of
17 that and we try to either identify it, air it out, bring the
18 hazmat team down range, and get a measurement of what that is. If
19 we repeat that 35, then they'll red-tag the appliance or whatever
20 it is causing the CO call. And typically it's some natural gas
21 issue, that a pilot's gone out or something like that.

22 However, other than that, we don't have a mechanism. If
23 there's a gas call that a company goes out to somewhere in the
24 city, I don't typically get notified of that. We do have a policy
25 for high occupancies, that if a gas call comes in on a high

1 occupancy, we're supposed to go. I would like to say though,
2 we've had a -- we have had a problem, communication wise, of
3 getting the team to be called out to these gas calls. And we've
4 had discussions about it. And I -- as I've said, it's not may job
5 to dispatch ourselves. It's to give them the policy, hey, we have
6 a policy on -- here it is. Here's the SOP to dispatch the hazmat
7 team. So that's where it stands.

8 Other than that, if we're not called, I won't know. So --
9 and we weren't. We probably should have been, in my opinion, a
10 part of that initial box response. If you have an explosion of
11 some sort, of an unknown, that's by definition a hazardous
12 materials incident.

13 Q. Um-hum.

14 A. Until we identify and quantify what caused that incident.
15 Now, we don't always -- we're not always able to identify it. As
16 I tell people though, part of our job is to tell you what's not
17 there. And so, you know, I think sometimes too there's a process
18 with hazmat guys kind of get accused of being the "we never have a
19 easy answer to things."

20 And so, you know, as I tell them, hey look, this monitor is
21 not like this iPhone where you pick it up and take a phone call.
22 There's a lot of different things we have to look at. And so, I
23 tell them, hey you think it's CO, but it may not be CO. It could
24 be 10 to 12 other cross-sensitivity gases that we have to look at.
25 And we have a process of elimination to find out what those are.

1 That's if we get there. And that's not our job, that's not our
2 call, you know. I think that's something we can work on though.
3 It's how do we work to get better, to get us there.

4 Q. Okay. If I can ask a hypothetical. If you were called on
5 the initial, what do you think your approach would have been?

6 A. So, Wednesday or Thursday? When you say initial, are you --
7 the first response? Or just on Friday?

8 Q. Well, let's talk about the Wednesday and Thursday's.

9 A. Yes, sir. Well, we obviously would have had a, you know,
10 when we -- they're fighting a fire, they're putting it out. As
11 soon as they told us, or they had a thought that there was natural
12 gas involved, because I've heard statements already say, hey, we,
13 were told there was gas involved, or we thought there was gas
14 involved. I think due diligence would've had us out there and we
15 could've monitored at least around the perimeter of the area to
16 find out, and give you a baseline of do we have a combustible
17 atmosphere beyond the point of ignition.

18 And that's where we'd have started. And obviously, we'd have
19 monitored until we found out where that wasn't. Typically, we can
20 tell you how big that's going to be. You know, you can see the
21 perimeter now you're dealing with. And so, which is one of the
22 reasons why we came up with this concept to help save resources,
23 but to also have a baseline and say, hey, we know for a fact that
24 there wasn't a combustible atmosphere in this occupancy right now.
25 I would like to have that policy all the time. And we probably

1 should. So, but that's how we'd of approached it.

2 And, you know, going our site safety plans, and our typical
3 nomenclature that we use, and paperwork, and make sure things
4 are -- I's are dotted, and T's are crossed. So, and I think we're
5 pretty good about that. I think our team is pretty squared away
6 with -- you know, we're highly respected in the area. We have a
7 lot of good training. We're a Type 1 team. We have a lot of good
8 equipment, a lot of -- we have a lot of equipment that a lot of
9 teams around the country don't have.

10 And, so I think from that standpoint, yeah, we have a lot of
11 pride and it's a little disappointing when we're not called out
12 immediately. And I don't -- I'm not sure, you know, if I asked
13 this, is it that you don't, you really don't trust us? Do they
14 not know what we do? Could it be a little of both? I don't know.
15 And so, my job is just to keep our team trained up and when we are
16 called, to make sure we perform at the highest level when we're
17 there.

18 Q. Thank you for that. If I can get you to give us a little
19 education on the equipment that you had on Friday? The names and
20 it's general functions, its purpose.

21 A. Sure. So we had the Sensit Gold G2, combustible gas
22 indicator --

23 Q. One more time?

24 A. The Sensit Gold G2 Combustible Gas Indicator.

25 Q. There must be an acronym or a nickname for --

1 A. CGI is what you typically call that. Yes, sir.

2 Q. Oh, okay. Got it.

3 A. And that measures LEL, CO, O2, and H2S.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Then we have the MultiRAE that we took with us. And
6 typically on a gas call, if we have a known, sometimes they may
7 not take the MultiRAE in, but we want to, like I said, we want to
8 tell you exactly what's not there, and so, we also -- when we
9 sample unknowns, you may tell me it's a gas call, but I have to
10 make sure to quantify that. So when we sample that area, that
11 unknown atmosphere, we sample for all of it.

12 We have radiologic -- I can tell you that with the background
13 on the RAD was that day, I can tell you it was 20.9 percent
14 oxygen. I can tell you it was zero percent LEL. We had no H2S.
15 There was no indicators of raised carbon monoxide levels, and
16 there was no VOCs, Volatile Organic Compounds. We picked up none
17 of those, and that was the -- on the PID, the Photoionization
18 Detector, with the MultiRAE. So we can rule all those out.

19 So that's the equipment we used, and that's the equipment we
20 typically do use. Of course, if we do get a hit on some of those,
21 then we come back to the colorimetric tubes and quantify. I
22 consider those qualitative. And so, we'll use the combustible, or
23 the colorimetric tubes to quantify, even though there's a 20 to 30
24 percent correction factor there, I can pull the tubes and at least
25 tell you that if we go, okay, well, we know it's a hydrocarbon, so

1 we'll pull a hydrocarbon tube; that's a positive test.

2 Now let's -- what hydrocarbon are we going with, and we'll
3 pull those. We know that CO₂ can mimic the CO. Hydrogen atoms do
4 that, so we'll pull those and just go down the list until we get a
5 positive, and I can tell you what they are. And so, that's the
6 kind of what, the approach we do.

7 We didn't have to on this case because we didn't have
8 anything to lead us down that step. So, like I said, all the
9 levels were normal that we tested, but that's how we typically
10 respond.

11 Obviously if it's a gas, or a liquid, or a solid, we go down
12 to other steps with the sampling process of the unknown, but -- I
13 typically tell our guys, there's two different responses. There's
14 the knowns and the unknowns. And even when we have a known, it's
15 typically a lot of times the information that's not correct. So
16 we always go down the unknowns to quantify what we say if we get
17 this known. So, that's the approach we take. Sometimes it's good
18 information, sometimes it's not. But it's our jobs to make sure
19 it is.

20 Q. Very good. Thank you for that. Just one question on the
21 continuing education, if that's -- I heard you do all three
22 shifts --

23 A. Yes, sir.

24 Q. -- that are exposed to that. How long is the classroom?

25 A. So the class typically starts at 8, so -- ironically, we had

1 one this morning; they're with the EPA today doing radiological
2 training on radiological disbursement devices on some new stuff
3 that's coming out. And so --

4 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: -- be out at 1:00.

5 MR. BAKER: Yes, sir.

6 And so, they're doing that today, and so this is our February
7 CE.

8 BY DR. JENNER:

9 Q. Um-hum.

10 A. January was natural gas and identifying unknown and testing
11 unknown environments. And so, we have a schedule for the year
12 that I print out. Typically the last quarter of the previous
13 year. So in the last quarter of 2017, we have the schedule for
14 2018. And that was to last from 8 AM to about 12. Sometimes
15 it'll be 1:00 or 2:00, depending on where we're going, or the
16 content that we're going over.

17 Q. Um-hum.

18 A. Most of those, we try to have at our training facility, and I
19 bring instructors in, and I always try to go to outside
20 instructors that are certified credential, credited. We're big on
21 that. I don't bring anybody in that's just off the street. I
22 make sure that their credentials and they're credited, look at
23 their background, because we want to make sure our records, when
24 we have our CE records, it's just, that it's actual NEPA
25 standards, OSHA standards. We're very big on compliance. That's

1 part of -- that's most of my job is compliance and, you know,
2 making sure that everybody's up-to-snuff on their stuff, so --

3 Q. How would you conceptualize the communication and
4 coordination you had between, for Friday's incident, between you
5 and Atmos?

6 A. Well, I would say it's fairly good. I mean, for a utility
7 company and us, I think we have a pretty good communication
8 process with all our utility companies. Typically when we have an
9 incident in Dallas, they're pretty fast to respond. There's --
10 you know, obviously we don't, you know, we don't have a button
11 that we push that they immediately call us or anything like that.
12 There is a process.

13 They go through communication 9-1-1, the 9-1-1 operator,
14 usually the incident commander requests those services there.
15 Sometimes they'll call us if they're on the scene. It doesn't
16 happen very often, but there may be times that Atmos may be there
17 and they might call us out, you know. Especially if they get an
18 environment that's what we'd consider a combustible or a toxic
19 environment.

20 Q. Okay. Is there any -- we're still early in the post-event,
21 but do you have any thoughts about how things could have been
22 improved in terms of communication, coordination or anything along
23 those lines?

24 A. Well, I think, you know, one of the things I'd like to see is
25 after the first fire on Wednesday, once the utility company

1 realizes that there's a problem in an area, is to coordinate that
2 and communicate that, not just to the companies that answered it,
3 but to communicate it to our hazardous materials team and let that
4 team know, hey, there's a problem over here. What that does, it
5 allows us to go through that process I said a while ago, is to
6 bring somebody out there and give some redundant testing.

7 And what I mean by that is, I know Atmos does their
8 atmospheric testing, but as I've said the last couple of days, and
9 I mean no disrespect to Atmos for this, Atmos is responsible for
10 the product and we're responsible for the people. And that's my
11 job. And I don't, you know, I don't make no waves about that. We
12 delineate that very clearly, in that our job is public safety.
13 And if there's a problem we need to know that. And so, that
14 communication process, I hope in the future would lead to some --
15 even if it's an email, text message, something of letting us know.

16 Q. Great. Appreciate your input.

17 A. Yes sir.

18 MS. GUNARATNAM: Jim?

19 MR. COLLINS: No questions.

20 MS. GUNARATNAM: Alex?

21 BY MS. COLLETTI:

22 Q. Alex Colletti. I'm sorry you mentioned a MultiRAE? What --
23 I'm not familiar with that. What is that?

24 A. Okay. So, MultiRAE's a photoionization detector. So it does
25 volatile organic compounds, oxygen. It has an LEL sensor on it.

1 Also, it also does oxygen content and CO. And so what we do is,
2 that's two different detections, and so one of my rules, we have
3 two different detectors, two different technologies for
4 redundancy. That way we can't come back and say, hey, we're
5 depending on just this one. And so, we're big on that. So we
6 want to make sure that we can quantify that from the first one.
7 Because if there -- if we didn't do that, there would always be a
8 question. And so, as I said, attorneys are good. And so, they
9 can come back and say, is that the only detection you used?
10 And so, we try to make sure we have redundancy built in.

11 Q. Okay. With regards to the colorimetric tubes, where do you
12 guys get your training on that? I'm just curious.

13 A. The colorimetric tubes?

14 Q. Um-hum.

15 A. So, we use -- we used to use Drager. Our training, typically
16 Lieutenant Harris is our senior hazmat. He's instructor qualified
17 to train. He does typically our CEs each year on the tubes
18 itself. And --

19 Q. After -- you know, you treat them as qualitative and not
20 quantitative.

21 A. Yes, that's correct. Yep, that's right.

22 Q. Preferably. Too many people do the other way.

23 MS. COLLETTI: That's all I have. Thank you.

24 MR. BAKER: Yes, ma'am.

25 MR. MURDOCK: No questions.

1 MR. COLLINS: No questions.

2 MS. GUNARATNAM: Okay. So, I'll go back around if anyone
3 else -- I did have a few questions.

4 BY MS. GUNARATNAM:

5 Q. Regarding your procedures in general about responding to a
6 gas incident. Who exactly dispatches you when there is one?

7 A. So our dispatch comes through what we call a 660. That's the
8 Dallas Fire Department dispatch as it comes through 9-1-1. The
9 typical procedure is they will send an engine company out on these
10 gas calls. And the officer there would typically make a decision
11 whether he needs hazmat or not. Most of the time, just the way
12 firefighters think, they're not going to call us. And I've heard
13 different things like, well, we don't want to bother you or
14 inundate you with nothing. And I think that's one of the areas
15 that we could get better at educating our department, is that --
16 this is my take is that we treat natural gas as kind of, hey, it's
17 -- we go all the time, it's no big deal.

18 One year ago, I was actually working at Engine 3 and we got
19 dispatched. Now remember, we're hazmat, but we're not hazmat
20 until we're called hazmat, right? So we're responding as a
21 regular engine company in the central business district. Our
22 procedures now state that under high occupancy, hazmat's supposed
23 to automatically be called. They weren't called that day. But as
24 the hazmat coordinator, I was actually covering as an officer on
25 overtime, riding the engine. When it came in, I told 660, hey,

1 this is high occupancy; we need to kick the hazmat team out.

2 Well, it wasn't 2 blocks from where we were at, when we
3 pulled up, it was a high-pressure line that a construction company
4 had struck, and -- with a drill bit, and the gentleman who was
5 running the drill bit came up to me and said, hey, we've hit the
6 drill -- we've hit the line. And you could hear it, you know,
7 that typical roar. It was next to a -- I think it was a eight-
8 story building, high occupancy, in the central business district,
9 downtown Dallas. And he says, I need to go over and turn it off.
10 When immediately I said, no, you're not going back over there.
11 Well, when he said that -- I caught my eye, looked up and the
12 drill bit was still running. So the next procedure was, you can
13 tell, it lit off.

14 Q. Um-hum.

15 A. And so the gas line lit off. Of course, we all know it here,
16 once the gas line's lit, that wasn't the real problem. The
17 problem is now, having fire companies come in and want to
18 potentially put that out, okay, and try and suppress it.

19 I kept telling, hey, we need to keep the flames from
20 impending on the building. We'll evacuate the building and we can
21 manage this until the gas company get's there. And we'll monitor
22 down range as far as we need to, to find out what those levels
23 are. But because the way we answered, we answered, as I said, at
24 first an engine company and not as the hazmat team. So once it's
25 spun up as a hazmat team, now I've got to take this engine and

1 crew, who's the first in on the scene, and we've got to try to
2 reverse engineer this a little bit and try to play chess to now
3 respond as a hazmat team.

4 That's where I told, talk about the response plans for us, is
5 that in the perfect hazmat world, we'd have a dedicated team. 660
6 would have notified us, hey, there's a gas leak in a high
7 occupancy building in downtown Dallas, and we would've responded.
8 Now would it have changed it going off? No, it wouldn't have.
9 Okay. But I don't want to be the predictor. We try to go to
10 outcome based and not say, well, we don't answer. How many of
11 those go off, and we've heard that.

12 I mean, there's been talk in our department that, hey, we
13 want to cut the gas calls down for hazmat. This was 2 or 3 years
14 ago. And so, the previous coordinator before me, they purchased a
15 2-gas monitor that used a metal oxide sensor. I think it cost
16 about 300 bucks. When I first took over, I had some of the hazmat
17 team members say, hey, we need to get rid of that. That's a
18 bad -- it's bad detection, it's not good, let's get rid of it.

19 Well, then you ask yourself, what do you go back to? I made
20 the recommendation that we go back to the 1-gas ToxiRAE single-gas
21 CO detector just for the fact from the qualitative standpoint, it
22 let's the engine know, hey, we have a problem here. And then we
23 bring the hazmat team down to quantify what that gas is.

24 We've had some problems with that detector and we've had some
25 problems getting our hazmat team called out on gas calls. I think

1 that's public knowledge, and how we work on that, how's that
2 fixed? That's a dispatch issue. It's not -- I mean, I can't do
3 that, so --

4 Q. Does dispatch ever -- so you said the gas company only gets
5 called at request of the officer when he arrives at the scene?

6 A. The hazmat team gets called at the --

7 Q. Sorry, sorry. I'm talking about the gas utility company.
8 When they -- when there is a gas incident, possible gas incident
9 and the engine's there, that's when the request goes out for the
10 utility.

11 A. Yes, ma'am, that's correct. Now there's sometimes that --
12 and you can -- I don't want to say all the time, because it's never
13 always, there are times that the gas company could have been
14 called previously, if I needed a person there, the bystander,
15 whoever.

16 Q. Um-hum.

17 A. But that's typical how it gets processed.

18 Q. Sure. So is that usually the first reaction though, is to
19 call the gas utility company, rather --

20 A. Yes, ma'am.

21 Q. -- than the hazmat team?

22 A. That's correct.

23 Q. Okay. And do you agree or not agree?

24 A. I disagree.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. That should be part of the process, but as I said earlier, I
2 think there's a overreliance on that in our department, even in
3 this incident. I've explained the last 3 days why we had this
4 team spun up. People are asking me why are we out here? And my
5 initial answer is we're here for public safety and we have an
6 incident that's happened, and we want to make sure it doesn't
7 happen again now.

8 Does that mean we're going to detect everything? No, you're
9 not. I mean, I think it's a team process and the utility's a part
10 of that. But their job is not necessarily emergency response.
11 Their job is product control. Okay? And our job is to protect
12 the people and to protect the gas company. So if we see something
13 unsafe that they're about to do, we would intervene and say, hey,
14 we recommend that that doesn't, that does not happen.

15 And under product release, under Title 49 OSHA 19.10.120.
16 All those things that we go by, we have that authority. When we
17 set the hot zone, let's talk this out and make sure we do the best
18 to protect the most people.

19 And so, I don't agree that the utility company should be
20 called first. They should be called, but as far as emergency
21 response goes and the dispatch, the hazmat team should be one of
22 the first people called.

23 Q. And you guys, does hazmat have specific procedures that are
24 different from the general fire department procedures for
25 responding to a natural gas incident? Like do you guys have your

1 own procedures or are they all the same procedures for how to
2 respond to a natural gas incident?

3 A. Well, can you clarify what you mean by that question a little
4 bit because as far as getting there? Or as far as the process?
5 What -- kind of explain.

6 Q. Well, when you're, when you are dispatched --

7 A. Yes, ma'am.

8 Q. -- to an incident, is it different from like, does hazmat
9 have different procedure when they arrive on scene? I know you
10 guys do different things, but is it --

11 A. So that's a great -- okay. So, yes and no. We would get
12 there and report to the incident commander, whoever that is, and
13 set up a hazmat group.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. And the highest ranked officer in hazmat would be the hazmat
16 group supervisor. And we flow that information back through, and
17 we will set up a site safety plan. One of the things that I will
18 say is different, and I don't want to speak for the rest of the
19 department, but I -- you know, federal law says that I have to
20 have an IAP, Incident Action Plan, for each hazmat incident. So
21 we don't get the distinction of saying we don't have -- we're not
22 going to do an IAP. We're going to do the IAP. We're going to
23 have site safety plan. If we're there, we're going to have it.

24 Q. Um-hum.

25 A. So, from that stand point, I think there is a difference

1 there. Okay? But that's typically how it flows, we report to the
2 commander, hazmat group's set up, and then we get our team
3 together, set up our decon, find out what we're dealing with, and
4 then get our recon team to go around range and find out what we're
5 dealing with.

6 Q. Um-hum. So how do you work with the safety officer on --
7 who's different from you guys?

8 A. So the safety officer is the safety officer to the incident
9 commander and under them is the hazmat safety officer, typically
10 called the assistant safety officer. However, under hazmat, in
11 19.10.120, we're required to have the safety officer. There's not
12 always a safety officer at some of these incidents.

13 Now on the structure fire and response for the Dallas Fire
14 Department, our second battalion chief has typically been the
15 safety officer. Now we have a different division they just
16 started with the safety chiefs. What we -- and that's a great
17 question of going forward, how that works together. In my mind,
18 as the hazmat coordinator, the hazmat safety officer's responsible
19 for everything inside the warm and hot zone, and the safety
20 officer's responsible for the cold zone and back. And they will
21 work together. But that assistant safety officer, who we call the
22 hazmat safety officer, when that's a hazmat incident, he can
23 terminate anything in that process that he deems unsafe.

24 Q. Um-hum.

25 A. And he has that authority. Our safety officers aren't

1 necessarily hazmat technicians. So, in our mind, if you're not
2 qualified to that level, you wouldn't even be down there. Does
3 that make sense?

4 Q. Um-hum. Thank you for clarifying.

5 A. Yes, ma'am.

6 MS. GUNARATNAM: Okay, does anybody else? Oh sorry.

7 DR. JENNER: I don't.

8 MS. GUNARATNAM: Chief? Chief?

9 CHIEF PADGETT: No.

10 MS. GUNARATNAM: Okay.

11 BY MS. COLLETTI:

12 Q, Alex Colletti. In terms of, and if this is outside the
13 scope, NTSB can stop me. But in terms of the other evacuations
14 that were going on in the area recently, what has the
15 communication with Atmos been? How are you getting called out?
16 It seems like you guys have been working a lot.

17 A. We have.

18 Q. So I'm just curious as to how that works.

19 A. Sure. So Atmos has their command post sitting next to our
20 command post, and I can only speak for the nighttime, in the
21 operational period that I've been there. Typically what happens,
22 about every 10 minutes I will go over to their command post, and
23 there's been great communication with the board, where they're
24 keeping up what they're doing, where -- they'll come over to us
25 and say, hey, we're fixing to do this, we're getting this, we need

1 you -- could you, mind sending a team with them? We'll send our
2 recon team down range with them, and if they tell us there's a
3 service leak, we -- they're evacuating the area, we'll go in and
4 actually get the readings inside the occupancy.

5 One -- and we've talked about this, is I want to make sure
6 when we go back, that we have a baseline when we do the
7 reoccupation. And I've told them the last few days, the
8 reoccupation of this is just as important as the evacuation.
9 Because what we don't want to have happened, and I told them this
10 last night -- we've come to an agreement that we don't reoccupy
11 without service being established. There was some reoccupation
12 without service. The reason I'm concerned about that is that when
13 it starts raining today and tomorrow, in the next 48-hours, the
14 temperature's going to drop also. So up to Thursday I think that
15 the lows are going to be in the 40s. These people will heat the,
16 their houses with whatever process they can. And what we don't
17 want to have happen is start having CO emergencies and start
18 having a lot of calls within the perimeter. And so, I've asked
19 them to hold off occupation until service is restored to the
20 actual place.

21 And so what the plan is right now, we look at -- is to try to
22 get a grid survey of that area and get an idea of those grids, how
23 many people are displaced in that area, and start a systematic
24 process of reoccupation in the grid. We'll see how that goes.

25 That's not my call. It's just an idea, and an advisement.

1 They did, they did tell me last night though, they agreed that
2 reoccupying without service is probably a bad idea. And so, I
3 think we've got an informal agreement on that.

4 Q. Okay. When you assist in that reoccupation, what does that
5 look like? Are you going into the home and perform any readings?
6 Or how do you help with that?

7 A. That's a great question. We haven't sit down and talked
8 about that just yet. We're going to go by the advisement of Atmos
9 of how they're going to do that. And I know they have to go
10 and -- they're, they've told me they're going to relight each
11 pilot in each home. And so, that process -- we haven't gone that
12 far yet, or what that looks like. It's a good discussion. We
13 were told this morning that they were going to try to restore
14 service to about a hundred homes today. And depending on weather,
15 and so we'll get a brief on that. I would like to see -- we do
16 know the baseline when they left; however, we don't know what's
17 built up between that.

18 Q. Um-hum.

19 A. And so I would like to see that that reoccupation of some
20 sort of monitoring needs to take place, of some sort. And so what
21 that looks like going forward, I'm not sure, but we're going to
22 have to come up with an ops plan on that. There's no doubt.

23 Q. And that raises another question in the timeline. Let's say,
24 just hypothetically, you have a house where it had a leak on the
25 service line. The gas company comes, evacuated, you guys reoccupy

1 it and go through all that. Is there a process in place for the
2 hazmat team to do any kind of monitoring, or is that something
3 that is more the responsibility of the gas company? Or once
4 reoccupation is done and the gas company cleared it before
5 reentry, you know, and you guys have cleared it for reentry, is
6 that where it stops?

7 A. Typically that is where it would stop, unless we get a call
8 back, either they're symptomatic or they're smelling gas of an
9 odor, we would go back. But there has to be a termination point
10 at some point, right?

11 Q. Absolutely, absolutely.

12 A. And typically that is, you know, once it's deemed safe from
13 all levels, they'll reoccupy.

14 MS. COLLETTI: Okay. That's it for me. Thank you, Captain.

15 MR. BAKER: Um-hum.

16 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No questions.

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No questions.

18 BY MS. GUNARATNAM:

19 Q. Okay. All right. Did you want to give us any more
20 information about the incident? Is there anything that I'm
21 leaving out that you'd like to provide?

22 A. Not right now. Like I said, my mind's -- I'm just so tired
23 that I'm a little fuzzy, but --

24 Q. Yeah.

25 A. I think we've discussed everything from my perspective that

1 needs to be discussed. I mean, I hope --

2 MS. GUNARATNAM: Okay. Well, thank you so much for coming
3 in --

4 THE WITNESS: It's pretty clear. You're welcome.

5 MS. GUNARATNAM: -- when you're sleep deprived.

6 THE WITNESS: Thanks. No problem.

7 MS. GUNARATNAM: And I really appreciate everything you given
8 us. Okay. We're ending the interview.

9 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD


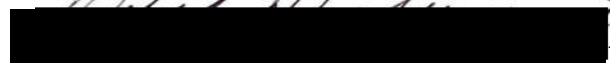
IN THE MATTER OF: NATURAL GAS-FUELED EXPLOSION OF
RESIDENCE, DALLAS, TEXAS
FEBRUARY 23, 2018
Interview of Bobbie Baker

ACCIDENT NO.: PLD18FR002

PLACE: Dallas, Texas

DATE: February 27, 2018

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



Deborah Dowling Swergart
Transcriber