

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *
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CSX TRAIN DERAILMENT IN HYNDMAN, * Accident No.: DCA17FR011
PENNSYLVANIA, AUGUST 2, 2017 *
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Interview of: MICHAEL AUSTIN

NTSB Headquarters
Washington, D.C.

Thursday,
September 7, 2017

APPEARANCES:

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

RANDY KELTZ, Manager, Tank Car Safety Program
Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

MICHAEL AUSTIN, Director of Hazardous Materials
CSX Transportation

STEVE AMMONS, System Road Foreman
CSX Transportation

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I N T E R V I E W

(11:21 a.m.)

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3 MR. STANCIL: Today is September 7, 2017. It's 11:21 a.m.
4 Today we're here at NTSB Headquarters in Washington, D.C. My name
5 is Paul Stancil. I'm a hazardous materials accident investigator
6 with the NTSB, and we're here to interview Mr. Michael Austin, who
7 was the incident commander for the response to the derailment of
8 CSX Transportation Train Q38831, with a subsequent hazardous
9 materials release in Hyndman, H-y-n-d-m-a-n, Pennsylvania, August
10 2, 2017. The NTSB number is DCA17FR011¹. Again, my name is Paul
11 Stancil.

12 We'll go around the table and introduce ourselves.

13 MR. AUSTIN: Michael Austin, Director of Hazardous Materials,
14 Senior On-Scene Coordinator for CSX Transportation.

15 MR. AMMONS: Steve Ammons, A-m-m-o-n-s, System Road Foreman,
16 Safety and Operating Practices, CSX.

17 MR. KELTZ: Randy Keltz, Federal Railroad Administration,
18 Manager of Tank Car Safety Programs.

INTERVIEW OF MICHAEL AUSTIN

19
20 BY MR. STANCIL:

21 Q. Okay. Mr. Austin, if you would just give us a little bit of
22 background as to what your current position entails, and how long
23 you've been with CSX, and what your duties are?

24 A. I've been with CSX now for 14 years, and my current roles and

¹ Corrected Accident Number

1 responsibilities as the director of hazardous materials and the
2 company's senior on-scene coordinator for major incidents and
3 accidents.

4 Q. Great. So with respect to your activities on August 2nd
5 responding to the incident, if you could just kind of give us an
6 overview of the activities that occurred that day, and go on
7 through until the time the incident scene was stabilized, please.

8 A. Okay. To the best of my recollection, that morning somewhere
9 around the, oh, little after 5:10 or so in the morning, I received
10 a call from my hazmat manager, Joe Taylor, advising me that we had
11 -- he had received a phone call that the train -- we had a train
12 derailment where a crew was reporting that there had been a fire
13 in Hyndman, Pennsylvania.

14 I immediately asked him, you know, where his location was,
15 and he was in LaVale, Pennsylvania -- LaVale, Maryland, just
16 outside of Cumberland, Maryland. I was just west of Columbus,
17 Ohio. I immediately just got myself up. He was getting
18 information. I started making calls to our Public Safety
19 Coordination Center, the chief train dispatcher, to get some more
20 on the -- we have a derailment; we have a fire.

21 Once it was confirmed from the train crew that we did have a
22 fire, at that point in time we didn't know what was on fire. I
23 initiated our emergency response plan to notify other hazmat
24 managers to respond, contractors to respond in that direction.
25 Joe was responding.

1 By the time I got on the road, I had talked to Joe a couple
2 of times en route just trying to get as much information between
3 the two of us as we could get on the train incident. And then I
4 lost service with him. It's an area that has basically limited to
5 no cell phone service.

6 Made sure that we communicated to know that as soon as he got
7 on-site, was able to get some sort of determination, get back to
8 cell service and, you know, call me.

9 By then I'm already en route. I've got the rest of our team
10 responding. I got a phone call from a number I didn't recognize,
11 and typically in the middle of an incident if I don't know the
12 number, I don't answer it. Luckily, I did answer it. It was Joe
13 calling me from a resident's house, a home phone. And he had
14 spoke to me that he had basically gotten there, and there was a --
15 there was definitely fire, definitely a derailment. He was
16 working with the fire department to do -- they were working on
17 some evacuation.

18 I could hear a roaring sound in the background. At the same
19 time I was ready to question him about it, he commences to tell me
20 that, you know, he thinks we have a PRD going off. That point in
21 time, I made it very clear that we had to make sure that everybody
22 was out of the area. Not knowing exactly which car because we
23 didn't -- at that point in time we didn't know where on the train
24 the derailment was.

25 So we left that conversation basically with, you know, he was

1 going to get the fire department to start backing everybody out.
2 He did advise the fire department was working on evacuations, and
3 I just basically made it clear that not just the people but the
4 fire department had to back up. Because I asked him how close he
5 was. I don't remember the exact distance, but it was enough where
6 I could hear on the phone, roaring through the phone pretty good.
7 So he was going to call me back with an update. Ten, 15 minutes
8 later, he calls me back. Same thing, I can hear it in the
9 background. They're working on getting the people out. They're
10 backing the fire department up. He's trying to get me car numbers
11 so we can get an indication of, you know, which one of these cars
12 was on fire.

13 He was able to tell me that we definitely had asphalt
14 spilled. Said he could smell some sulfur so we knew we had sulfur
15 at some point in time spilled, or didn't know the magnitude of it.

16 Was also, one of the phone calls -- there was three or four
17 phone calls in the midst of that evacuation and talking to them to
18 me that we had basically put two cars through two houses. They
19 were -- you know, at this point in time there had been no
20 fatalities or injuries that had been reported.

21 Once again, while responding, initiating the, you know, the
22 rest of our hazmat team to respond, the local contractors to
23 respond. On the phone with our folks in Jacksonville, briefing
24 them, getting air monitoring and stuff established, working
25 through just that initial wave of people to respond.

1 A couple more conversations with Joe, that they basically
2 had got everybody backed up. They had gone to this charter
3 school. And the last time he had been at the site, he had made
4 three or four entries from the bridge where the fire department
5 and stuff was, that they basically had gone back to this charter
6 school. It was like a quarter of a mile of the church -- or --
7 excuse me -- of the derailment. I asked him if he felt that at
8 that point in time that it was safe to be at that location. He
9 said he hadn't gotten to that point yet where he had seen exactly
10 how far this was, but his focus at that point now was making sure
11 that all of the responders were out and the people were evacuated.

12 Made sure that our train crews and stuff got out because we
13 did have some of our mechanical folks working with Joe to try to
14 make a determination of what was derailed. So we just made -- at
15 that point in time we made it clear that everybody had to be out,
16 just not knowing.

17 I arrived on-site right about the 10 o'clock hour. I met
18 with Joe at the charter school. Got basically a quick rundown
19 from him, met with our senior transportation official that was
20 onsite, Trainmaster McGowan. Basically got a rundown from him.
21 And I needed to talk to, you know, the fire chief. We wanted to
22 obviously at that point in time try to make an entry. It was
23 daylight now. We had a little bit more -- we had some other eyes
24 on the site that we could, you know, make a decent entry.

25 So we formulated a team, formulated a plan to go in. So the

1 team at that point in time, and my -- one of my other managers,
2 Joe Cocamo (ph.), had actually pulled up in the midst of this. So
3 it was myself, Joe Taylor, Joe Cocamo, Drew McCarty from SPSI, and
4 we had four or five firemen who were our backup. We all piled on
5 the fire truck, made it down to the bridge, and the moment we
6 stepped out of the fire truck onto the bridge, Joe looked at me
7 and just -- I don't want to say he kind of pulled me to the side,
8 but kind of pulled me aside and said, this is twice as loud than
9 what it was 3 hours ago. And you could literally see the
10 blowtorch fire shooting up from behind the houses.

11 We looked, we looked. We just weren't in a comfortable
12 position where we could -- the way the tank car was positioned,
13 not wanting to be on the ends of that tank car, we couldn't get
14 ourselves in a position to get around it to get to a better angle.

15 So I made a decision that point in time we were going to pull
16 everybody out. I verified with Joe again, you know, the sound,
17 the pitch, you know, the fire itself, to verify that we are
18 definitely talking something more intense than what it was a few
19 hours before; 100 percent certainty. Drew McCarty had gone up, I
20 guess, on one of the entries with him, confirmed the same thing.

21 We loaded back on the fire truck, went back up to the charter
22 school, climbed off, and we made a decision that we needed to talk
23 to the fire chief, that we felt that where we were located was
24 probably not a sufficient location, not knowing the condition of
25 the tank car -- I mean, not being able to completely see it but

1 enough to hear that it's talking to us. So it was time for us to
2 do something different.

3 This place was also -- this was also all the responders,
4 everybody responded in, and the evacuees were all in this
5 building, was at the school. So it wasn't like the most conducive
6 place for us to be to start. So they -- we took the fire chief,
7 the police captain, who basically took the role of the incident
8 commander role -- which was a little different, as to most fire
9 departments the fire chief is. This fire chief was good, he just,
10 he just didn't -- he didn't stand up to be the guy that was going
11 to be in charge.

12 We had discussions with them. We made a recommendation then
13 that we felt that we needed to back up further. They said that
14 the next closest place was back up at the next church, which was
15 going to be at the Maryland-PA line. And at the time, my mindset
16 was, okay, I remember seeing it coming in. It's like a mile or so
17 away, that's perfect. Let's just get everybody back to that
18 point. Well, that's like 3 miles away concept.

19 So once we got everybody back, we completely evacuated that
20 building. We made sure that all residents got out. Everybody
21 that didn't need to be there, we got them all loaded on buses and
22 cars and got them out of there completely. Our police department
23 along with a couple of my managers made sure that the residents
24 that wanted to leave left. And then the Pennsylvania State Police
25 assisted with those that didn't want to leave. Basically just

1 made it clear to them that, you know, they needed to leave, and if
2 they chose to stay, that was on them basically. They were being
3 asked to evacuate.

4 So we went to the church. Worked through several meetings.
5 Little later in the day we were in a position where one of my
6 other managers showed up. So we had a team of four at this point
7 in time. It was about the 4 o'clock hour or so, where we made --
8 worked with the fire chief and stuff, got permission to make
9 another entry. This time we just -- this was more for us to try
10 to work ourselves to a position where we could -- we had flown
11 over with the helicopter already. We had already seen it from a
12 helicopter. But -- and watching the video from the State Police,
13 but just not physically kind of depicting what our story was.
14 Because the helicopter was -- they were on one of the trips -- I
15 took the helicopter ride out after the evacuation got extended,
16 and they were concerned about the tank car, you know, basically
17 taking them out of the sky. So they were, you know, at 3- or
18 4,000 feet in the air and just kind of zooming in on their camera.
19 So it gave us a good perspective that, yes, and it looked like at
20 that point in time we had several punctures in the tank car.
21 Yeah, we definitely had the blowtorch effect on the one end of the
22 car and then we definitely had more spot fires throughout the car.
23 You could definitely see the asphalt. Could see the sulfur laying
24 out there that was burning.

25 So then myself, Joe Taylor, Joe McCann, and Joe Cocamo make

1 this about 4 o'clock entry. We went down. We met at the fire
2 station. We got gaitered over to the bridge, and we actually got
3 ourselves in a position where we could come in down the end of
4 Cleveland Street, and put us down by the houses that were
5 basically right over by the cars. So we were not on the ends of
6 where that car was. So we were now on the side of where that car
7 was.

8 Lot of heat. I mean, even now at that point it was still a
9 lot of heat. Fire was just, I mean, an absolute inferno. You
10 could see what appeared to be -- we weren't sure if it was a tear,
11 but it turned out to be the bulge in the tank. You could see that
12 part. Several fires. We made ourselves to the top of the hill up
13 onto the actual track structure to look down. Same mindset. At
14 this point in time that car was not in a condition for us to mess
15 with. Best thing at that point in time was just let the car do
16 what it was going to do.

17 At that point in time I was starting to feel -- I want to say
18 more and more we're closing in on 12 hours of that car sitting
19 there burning. I felt more comfortable of the fact that we
20 weren't going to have a catastrophic release, but I still felt
21 that we potentially had a problem, that we knew that -- I mean,
22 the car could open up and may not, you know, like I said, be a
23 catastrophic release, but enough to be an issue.

24 Went back to the incident commander. Had another unified
25 command meeting basically with the mindset to let the car burn,

1 let it do its thing. So our kind of focus was at that point in
2 time continue to do air monitoring, keep people away, restrict
3 access to the area. Then it became the -- for the rest of that
4 evening it was more focused on getting plans and stuff for how we
5 would move forward, and at the same time assisting our -- the
6 community outreach folks with handling the rest of the
7 evacuations, pets, pills, and handling that aspect of it.

8 Now in the midst of all this working with the unified command
9 and -- I say unified command. I mean, it was the fire chief.
10 We'd call him. He really wasn't a fixture at the church. He was
11 more at the fire station. We'd have to call him, and he'd come up
12 for a meeting or whatever it may be. But the captain from the
13 police department was there the entire time. We had DEP, people
14 from the state. So we had a lot of people in the room. They
15 initiated their I&T for Pennsylvania, so that brought a slew of
16 more people in.

17 So we went through several meetings of more of what we were
18 going to do, how we were going to move forward. And so then as
19 daylight basically came, we put ourselves -- got ourselves in a
20 position where the fire had died down some, but we still had a lot
21 of heat. We still had the blowtorch effect.

22 So we worked up some plans, and the fire seemed to, as the
23 day wore on, the second day basically the fire started to
24 decrease. So that gave us an opportunity to actually get in, and
25 we started ripping the jacket apart to determine -- looking for a

1 frost line. We made a determination that the car probably had 2-
2 of 3,000 gallons at least left in it. Frost line was -- one end
3 of the car was 6 or 8 inches high. The other one was probably 15
4 inches high. So we had product from one end to the other end of
5 the car even with it sitting on an angle.

6 At the rate at this point in time the fire was burning, the
7 blowtorch effect was pretty much done. But with that much product
8 in it, we weren't going to put ourselves in a position to be there
9 and keep people out and have a uncomfortable situation for several
10 days. So we developed a plan to work with a wrecking crew using
11 our contractors. They had a -- they were on air, you know, and
12 Nomex, TurnaKey (ph.) or things like that. And we actually, we
13 saw -- we could see then where a hole was in the car, which put us
14 in a position where we knew we could roll the car and not have it
15 to where the product would come out based on the level of the car.
16 And that would help, that would actually help us expedite the
17 boiling off of the product. And then if we needed to start
18 pushing, you know, steam, nitrogen, whatever we needed to do to
19 help the cause, then it put us in a position where we could get to
20 the valves and fittings to do that.

21 So we discussed that process for about an hour just to make
22 sure we were all on the same page. We all felt comfortable with
23 the level of where this -- once we made the turn, we weren't going
24 to put liquid out on the ground. So we managed some of the sulfur
25 fires, put those out. Got the car rolled. And basically at that

1 point in time, I mean, it definitely helped the process because it
2 took it on the hot metal, expedited some of the fire. We were
3 able to actually determine that we had basically one hole in the
4 one end, and the other one was just liquid that had gone in
5 between the jackets. So we didn't have multiple holes in the car.

6 Finished getting through the process of getting that part
7 burned off. We start pushing some nitrogen into it to help
8 expedite getting through the process. And that lasted, that stint
9 was probably 12 hours of working through that, with getting to --
10 actually getting to the point where the fire was out. And then we
11 basically started flaring off the vapors and making the car safe.

12 We continued through the operation that night, and then by
13 6- -- and the only reason why I know these numbers, like 6:23 the
14 next morning the car was completely empty, clean and purged, fire
15 out.

16 Q. And that was Friday morning?

17 A. Friday morning.

18 Q. So we ended up with -- now we have sulfur burning still,
19 somewhat deep-seated sulfur, if you will, in some areas. So we
20 were actually working to kind of combat that. And then we ended
21 up with our industrial hygiene group working with the DEP in
22 reference to the air monitoring, in reference to the sulfur
23 dioxide levels. And basically in and around the location, and
24 then based on wind direction, you know, we had some spikes here
25 and there. But then became the request about the reentry of

1 people in the residence and what that level needed to be. I don't
2 know the exact terminology of the sampling, but this was more in-
3 depth type sampling that had to go in canisters, be shipped out to
4 a lab to verify what these readings were.

5 Better part of the day was spent having meetings and
6 discussions about an EPA standard for residents versus the
7 Pennsylvania Health Department's request of standard. They wanted
8 us to go to a parts per billion, which was well below the limits
9 for EPA.

10 And trying to get those and get their samples back, it takes
11 -- I mean, by the time you got the sample, we got them couriered,
12 I mean, we were potentially going to be looking for several days
13 to get people back. So we actually worked through some meetings,
14 rushed the samples, got the first of those samples back in about
15 12 hours. So that puts us to Saturday morning, where it becomes
16 an issue of just, I mean, what are we doing to tell the public?
17 How are we going to tell the public? Working with the folks. We
18 had one sample come back elevated above their request, but we're
19 still below the EPA's request. And that was basically due to wind
20 direction of where the smoke went. Everything else around it was
21 below the limit that they wanted.

22 So at that point in time, it was about 11:30 Saturday morning
23 when everybody from a unified command perspective, the state, us,
24 everybody was comfortable that it was safe to let people back in.
25 The fires were out. So at noon on Saturday -- we made the

1 announcement at 11:30 to the unified command, and at 12 o'clock,
2 they held a press briefing to -- reentry of the residents.

3 Q. Okay. You -- going back to that 4 p.m. entry you mentioned
4 on the first day where you mentioned you noticed the bulge in the
5 tank, was that the first time it was noticed?

6 A. That's the first time I noticed it.

7 Q. First time.

8 A. Because we -- I think more because we were actually able to
9 get, we were actually able to get to the side of the car. One
10 point in time I actually was on top of a hopper and was looking
11 kind of right at the top of the car. Yeah, you can't -- you see
12 that you had the number 45 car, a GATX3501.

13 Q. Um-hum.

14 A. The hopper car next to that, that's on its side, I was up on
15 that -- I was on top of that car up next to that car 45.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. And gave us the -- kind of the best vantage to figure out,
18 you know, how big a hole was, if we could see it. I mean, because
19 at that point in time is when we still had the blowtorch effect.
20 And the way that it appeared, it looked like -- and then it didn't
21 look like a bulge. To me it looked like it was ripped open there.
22 Because the fire that was just, I mean, coming out of there was
23 horrendous. It definitely appeared to be -- I mean, I've seen the
24 hole since then, but I would have thought the hole was going to be
25 bigger the way that fire was coming out of there.

1 Q. Right. Right.

2 A. So.

3 Q. Did anyone measure the temperature of the tank shell? Did
4 they put a thermal gun on it?

5 A. My guys had thermal imagers, and I don't recall if we -- if
6 they ever got a temperature off the car or not, but they did carry
7 them in.

8 Q. Okay. So at some point later there was additional entries
9 and discussion about that bulge in the shell. Is there any
10 concern that the car was going to fail even once the pressure had
11 decreased?

12 A. Based on our observations, and when we were having these
13 discussions, we were physically standing in that picture to the
14 right of the CBTX78153. You've got that white looking material
15 there, then you've got what looks like a set of tracks in the
16 dirt. The next house to the right, we were literally standing
17 next to that house when we were having these discussions. Based
18 on the fact that at this point in time we were probably 14 or 16
19 hours into the incident, and the pressure had decreased at that
20 point in time and the fire and the torch effect had diminished, we
21 felt more comfortable at that point in time we weren't going to
22 have a release.

23 Q. And when would you say the situation had stabilized itself to
24 the point where there was no longer any concern about the tank
25 rupturing or --

1 A. I think between -- about the same time we were making the
2 decision about rolling the car. Once the -- most of the fire had
3 come down, we had actually ripped the jacket open from one end of
4 the car to the other; could see the frost line. I think we, at
5 that point in time, is where we felt -- I know I felt a whole lot
6 more comfortable that we weren't going to have a release or a
7 rupture.

8 Q. What was some of the greatest challenges that you all
9 experienced, you know, trying to manage this incident? I know
10 communications had to be the --

11 A. Communication. And that's one of the things that we've
12 learned is the -- it's nice to -- I shouldn't say this. It's nice
13 to work a derailment and not have a cell phone that works, but it
14 makes it challenging, especially when we have -- in this
15 particular instance, for me as an incident commander, to be 3½
16 miles away from the actual site trying to manage an incident. We
17 overcame some of that by having runners back and forth. We kept
18 one at each end. So if the crews had something that they actually
19 had to convey to me or if I had a message I needed to get to them,
20 basically we just had runners going back and forth between the
21 two. CSX, we did bring in a Verizon cell phone tower booster,
22 which actually gave us limited service down in -- actually near
23 the derailment site itself, which then helped it tremendously
24 because then we actually had some kind of communication.

25 From a -- from the rest of it, I mean, just not being able to

1 physically get up close and personal to the car, I mean, obviously
2 that's -- I mean, that was a challenge to us because we just -- we
3 could only get so close. And then it becomes an issue of safety
4 for not only my team, you know, but also are we making the right
5 decision here for the public?

6 Much other than that, I mean, the dealing with it from a
7 response standpoint, from the community standpoint of responders,
8 they couldn't have been any better to work with. They had enough
9 knowledge to know to get people out. They knew clearly that this
10 was way above anything they could handle. They relied on us
11 wholeheartedly to take care of it. And we just -- so from that
12 perspective, from a unified command, incident command type
13 structure, we didn't have any issues from that perspective. As
14 long as we came with good plans, good determination on what our
15 outcomes should be, and we kept them in the loop the whole time,
16 they were great to work with.

17 But the two biggest things was definitely not being able to
18 get up as close and personal as we would've liked to. And then
19 also, obviously communication was the other real major hazard.

20 Q. So SPSI was doing your industrial firefighting work and the
21 local fire department handled the evacuation and managing access
22 to the scene? Is that pretty much how --

23 A. Yes, sir.

24 Q. Did you all have -- in terms of resources that were available
25 and on scene at your disposal, was there any problem with that?

1 A. No, sir. We were -- I had more resources than we could
2 actually -- than we actually needed.

3 Q. Okay. In terms of working with the local emergency response
4 agencies and state and federal agencies that were there on the
5 scene, did everything go well? Was there any problem that was
6 encountered from that perspective?

7 A. From an emergency response standpoint, no. Everything was
8 about as good as it could get.

9 As I stated already, when it got to kind of talking about the
10 reentry and making determinations about letting the public back
11 in, working with the Health Department, working with the -- from a
12 state perspective, not from a local perspective, it got a little
13 challenging at times, but we were actually able to work and
14 overcome it. I mean, our biggest thing is to make sure that it's
15 safe for the public. And we follow laws, rules and regulations to
16 do that. And then when you get -- when we end up having to go
17 further than what, you know, a standard is, it makes sometimes a
18 little difficult. But we worked through it completely and --

19 Q. The state and local standard being different from the --

20 A. Federal.

21 Q. -- federal standard?

22 A. Exactly. And that's how we -- we had started -- we had gone
23 from the beginning with the EPA standard, and that's -- because we
24 didn't have much direction, if you will. The DEP and stuff was
25 there, but wasn't enough -- they weren't active enough. They were

1 more -- we had set some product in a drain which leads to Will's
2 Creek, which is a huge tributary through the area. Really
3 concerned about that. But when it came to much on, you know, this
4 aspect of reentry and air monitoring, there wasn't -- other than
5 us saying here's our data, here's the stuff, there wasn't much
6 interference there until somebody realized that we're going to
7 have to let people back in and is it safe to do that? And then
8 that's when it got pushed, you know, up the ladder.

9 Q. We had a conversation with Mr. Taylor about hazard
10 communications from the train crew to the local emergency
11 responders. That seemed to be fairly seamless?

12 A. We sat down -- I had a discussion with the chief, and the
13 assistant fire chief probably 2, 3 days into the incident.
14 Because that's always one of our biggest challenges is making sure
15 that -- it's what we preach when we teach everybody, when we're
16 teaching first responders, teaching our train crews, you know,
17 making sure that, you know, we got an incident, you got to find
18 somebody as a first responder. And then the first responder's
19 responsibility is to make sure they keep that guy there. Don't
20 let that guy walk off.

21 I'm not saying this was the best place for this to happen,
22 but it blocked the town. Ironically, I put an assistant chief on
23 one side of the track, put the fire chief on the other. They were
24 in ready communication with each other. Assistant chief talked to
25 the train crew, was getting the information from the train crew.

1 To me, I don't think it could have gone any better than that.

2 Q. So how long after the derailment was it known which cars were
3 involved in the pileup and which hazardous materials were
4 involved?

5 A. Before everybody was -- one of the last phone calls of me
6 saying get everybody out including our own people. But Joe had
7 worked with our mechanical folks. Joe Taylor had worked with our
8 mechanical folks, and we were -- they were in a position of trying
9 to move cars out of -- parts of the train away that weren't
10 impacted. Not knowing the situation, it was dark, seeing the
11 fire, you know, knowing we had a pressure type fire going, Joe's
12 mindset was whatever we can cut away, let's cut away.

13 So working through that, they had come in from one of the
14 ends where it was easier for them to figure out where the car
15 count started. So in that block, we had the opportunity to figure
16 out, okay, we figure we've got 30 or 40 cars derailed. Then we
17 could narrow down starting at car 33, whatever the car was. The
18 next 30 some cars, what's in that block. And then that's where we
19 were able to start kind of pinning down what we were potentially
20 dealing with.

21 Q. So you knew right away you were dealing with an LPG car?

22 A. Yes, sir.

23 Q. Right.

24 A. I mean, I -- when I say me, yeah, probably within, you know
25 -- then it would probably be an hour and a half into the incident

1 by the time, I mean, I had that communication. Joe knew on-site.
2 He had made the determination that we had a pressure car.
3 Obviously, it was screaming at us so we knew we had a pressure
4 car, just didn't know what was the product. And then that's when
5 they started working to try to figure out what was -- you know,
6 where we were in the derailment.

7 Q. So in terms of lessons learned or anything that's come out of
8 this incident thus far that you would be interested in sharing
9 with the overall response community, what would you say?

10 A. A couple key points. One is making sure that people are
11 getting that paperwork and talking to the train crew. I think in
12 talking to the fire chief there had been some training that was
13 scheduled. Joe had actually had training with that town
14 scheduled, but they ended up with a blizzard or something, and it
15 got cancelled. So they had limited, not a whole lot of, you know,
16 if you will, training for the railroad. But they were in a
17 position to where they knew there was a problem. They knew to
18 start evacuating people, getting to the train paperwork, getting
19 with the conductor, figuring out what was on the train, and
20 communicating that information.

21 One of the other lessons that come out of this that we
22 discovered, it makes it very difficult for places that don't have
23 cell phone service or Internet activity, is that, you know, the
24 railroads now have AskRail. And we were having some discussions
25 about it, and it's a great application for first responders, but

1 unfortunately in an area where you have no cell phone service, you
2 don't have connectivity. There's no access to it. So it's a
3 great tool, if you have access to it. So there, they were relying
4 solely on getting with the train crew, you know, understanding how
5 to call the railroads independently say, hey, what's on this
6 train, what's the problem here?

7 Q. So the old-fashioned paper consist is still required?

8 A. Still required. To me it's the most up-to-date accurate
9 information that's out there. Yeah, there's computer systems out
10 there, things like that, but there's -- nothing is going to beat
11 the guy standing there on the ground, a piece of paper that he has
12 physically started with, he has marked up, he knows exactly what's
13 in his train. I mean, that's where they got to start first.

14 Q. Good.

15 A. So but having that communication is the number one thing they
16 need to do. Have to. (Indiscernible) job.

17 MR. STANCIL: Randy, do you have anything you would like to
18 add?

19 MR. KELTZ: That was the question that I wanted to hear the
20 answer to. So, yeah.

21 MR. AUSTIN: Yeah, they --

22 MR. KELTZ: Thanks for asking, Paul.

23 MR. AUSTIN: We had some discussions about it with those
24 folks, and it's, you know, it's the opportunity that they clearly
25 need to understand that -- you know, modern technology, there's an

1 app for everything today. Not everywhere. And it's -- you know,
2 and it goes back to our initial response with, I mean, with Joe
3 calling me from -- you know, they were evacuating a lady, and they
4 had asked her just to leave her phone out on the front porch.
5 Lock or secure her house, but leave her phone on the front porch
6 so they could use it. I mean, that's the only communication we
7 had in the beginning was just using a resident's home phone.

8 So it's a -- you know, it's changed some of what we do. We
9 do have satellite phones. But one of the things that I've pushed
10 for and got approval for and we're going to make happen quickly is
11 making sure that all of my hazmat managers have satellite phone.
12 I mean, we've had them over time and -- the ones that hook to the
13 truck, and they're not the best in the world because you're 2
14 miles away from your truck at a wreck, you know, the cell phone
15 that's hooked to your truck doesn't work.

16 So we're looking into portable handhelds because we do have a
17 lot of area on the network where we don't have cell service. So
18 we're going to try to help that cause a little bit. We did learn
19 bringing in the Verizon and stuff towers immediately. Not
20 something we really focus in on. You figure out how to overcome
21 those communication issues, and that's sending somebody at the top
22 of the mountain or whatever it may be. And somebody from our IT
23 group in Jacksonville worked that with Verizon, got that tower out
24 there. So that's now on my list of we're going to get sooner than
25 later.

1 MR. STANCIL: Great, great.

2 MR. AUSTIN: It kind of helps the cause for everybody to
3 communicate. So --

4 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Perfect.

5 MR. STANCIL: No questions?

6 Is there anything we haven't asked you about, Mike, that you
7 think we should know about or you'd like to add?

8 MR. AUSTIN: No, I don't think so.

9 MR. STANCIL: Okay. Thank you very much for your time. I
10 appreciate you coming down here and sharing your knowledge of the
11 incident with us.

12 MR. AUSTIN: Any time.

13 MR. STANCIL: Thank you.

14 (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: CSX TRAIN DERAILMENT IN HYNDMAN,
PENNSYLVANIA, AUGUST 2, 2017
Interview of Michael Austin

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA17FR011

PLACE: Washington, DC

DATE: September 7, 2017

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.



Katherine Motley
Transcriber

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

NOTICE AND ASSURANCES TO INTERVIEWEE REQUESTED TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON A VOLUNTARY BASIS

You are being asked to provide information as part of an investigation being conducted by the NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD (NTSB) regarding the derailment of CSX Transportation Train Q38831 in Hyndman, Pennsylvania on August 2, 2017.

This interview is voluntary. Accordingly, you do not have to answer questions.

The purpose of NTSB investigations is to increase safety, not to assign fault, blame or liability. Our sole mission is to improve transportation safety and prevent accidents.

The NTSB cannot, however, offer any guarantee of confidentiality or immunity from any legal or certificate actions by other agencies, whether local, state, or federal.

A transcript of this interview will eventually be placed in the public docket for this investigation, which will be available via the NTSB website.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I understand this notice and am willing to make a statement and answer questions. No threats or promises have been made to me and no pressure or coercion of any kind has been used against me.

SEPTEMBER 7, 2017
(Date/Time)

NTSB HEADQUARTERS
(Location)

PAUL STANLIL
(NTSB Interviewer's Printed Name)

[REDACTED]
(NTSB Interviewer's Signature)

Shannon Michael Austin
(Printed Name)

[REDACTED]
(Signature)

STEVEN M AMMONS
(Attorney or Representative Printed Name)

[REDACTED]
(Attorney or Representative Signature)

RANDY M KEETE JR (FRA HM)
(Interviewer's Printed Name)

[REDACTED]
(Interviewer's Signature)