

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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PIPELINE LEAK OFF THE LOUISIANA *

COAST IN THE GULF OF MEXICO * Accident No.: PLD24FR001

ON NOVEMBER 16, 2023 *

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Interview of: ERNEST BOURGEOIS, Former Pipeline Operator
Third Coast Midstream

via Microsoft Teams

Tuesday,
November 28, 2023

APPEARANCES:

SARA LYONS, Investigator-in-Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

DANE SPILLERS, Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

DR. STEPHEN JENNER,
Human Performance and Systems Safety Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

KAREN BUTLER, Operations Supervisor
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration
(PHMSA)

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I N T E R V I E W

(2:00 p.m. CT)

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2
3 MS. LYONS: Okay. Good afternoon. Today's November 28th,
4 2023. It's now 2 p.m. Central Standard Time.

5 My name is Sara Lyons, and I'm the National Transportation
6 Safety Board's investigator-in-charge for this accident. We're
7 holding this interview virtually and over the phone. This
8 interview is being conducted as part of the investigation into the
9 crude oil spill that occurred on November 15th, 2023, in the Gulf
10 of Mexico. The NTSB Case Number for this accident PLD24FR001.

11 The interview is being recorded and may be transcribed at a
12 later date. A copy of the transcript will be provided to you for
13 review before being entered into the public docket.

14 You're permitted to have one other person present during the
15 interview. This can be someone of your choice, an attorney,
16 spouse, supervisor, friend, family member or no one at all. Can
17 you state for the record -- Ernie, I don't think you have anyone
18 with you today. Can you just state that for the record?

19 MR. BOURGEOIS: Yes, I don't -- I'm here by myself. I'm
20 alone.

21 MS. LYONS: Okay. So for the record, please state the
22 spelling of your full name and I understand you were fired from
23 your previous position but, if you could just state your job title
24 and position before -- while you were there.

25 MR. BOURGEOIS: Sure. My name's Ernest Bourgeois, E-r-n-e-s-

1 t, B-o-u-r-g-e-o-i-s. And I was the -- I'm the pipeline operator
2 for Third Coast.

3 MS. LYONS: Now, I'm going to go around the room and have
4 each person state their name with spelling, title and agency or
5 organization that they're representing. I'll start. My name is
6 Sara Lyons, S-a-r-a, L-y-o-n-s. I'm the investigator-in-charge of
7 this accident, and I'm representing the National Transportation
8 Safety Board. And then if we can go to Dane, Steve and then
9 Karen.

10 MR. SPILLERS: This is Dane Spillers, D-a-n-e, S-p-i-l-l-e-r-
11 s. I'm an accident investigator with the National Transportation
12 Safety Board.

13 DR. JENNER: Good afternoon. This is Stephen Jenner, S-t-e-
14 p-h-e-n, J-e-n-n-e-r. I'm a human performance and systems safety
15 investigator with the NTSB.

16 MS. BUTLER: Good afternoon. I'm Karen Butler, K-a-r-e-n, B-
17 u-t-l-e-r. And I'm an operations supervisor with PHMSA, and that
18 is the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration.

19 MS. LYONS: Okay. Thank you. So, with that, we're going to
20 go ahead and get started.

21 INTERVIEW OF ERNEST BOURGEOIS

22 BY MS. LYONS:

23 Q. So, Ernie, I was hoping that we could start out with just a
24 general description of your background and experience in the
25 position that you were in at the time of the accident. For

1 example, you know, any education that you had, prior similar
2 experience at other companies and how long you were with the
3 company at the time.

4 A. Okay. As far as background and school, just high school
5 diploma. I went to the oil field directly after. I was -- worked
6 for a little bit on tugboats, ended up getting into a measurement
7 position, and I held a measurement position for, oh, man, from
8 2004 to 2015 I think it is. And then 2015, I was contracted to
9 the Main Pass Oil Gathering Pipeline. And then eventually I was
10 hired on, and I was just the, I was just the operator. Like I
11 said, I've been there since 2015 on that pipeline. Also assisting
12 with other pipelines if they needed help with stuff.

13 Q. Okay. So from 2004 to 2015, I didn't really catch -- what
14 was the position that you were in for that time?

15 A. I was a measurement technician.

16 Q. Oh, okay. Measurement technician.

17 A. Measurement tech.

18 Q. Okay. Thank you. Okay. Do you remember when you were hired
19 on with MPOG, what year?

20 A. I think it was 2015 or 2016.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. I don't remember the exact year. It was towards the end of
23 the year. I think it was -- it was between 2015 and 2016.

24 Q. All right.

25 A. I'd have to go back and look exactly.

1 Q. No, no, an estimate is great. Thank you. So, what were your
2 responsibilities when you were working with MPOG? What was your
3 day-to-day responsibilities?

4 A. Daily stuff was DOD (ph.) valves. I (indiscernible).
5 Measurement. We did the meter proving for the monthly stuff on
6 the platform that connects to the line, and then we did biweekly
7 provings at Main Pass 69 which is where the pipeline ends. Just
8 day-to-day, just making sure everything was good over short stuff.
9 We did pig ins (ph.) monthly. Like I said, I also assisted with
10 other systems doing the same thing, testing, just kind of going
11 out with valve technicians and doing DOD valves stuff and whatnot.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. That's pretty much it.

14 Q. And when were you -- where you based out of? Where was your
15 main office?

16 A. My office in Houma, Louisiana.

17 Q. Okay. Were you mostly working out of Houma or were you
18 mostly onsite?

19 A. A little -- a mixture of both. A mixture of both. We did
20 spend a lot of time at Main Pass 69 but I would say half and half.

21 Q. Okay. And then did you have other responsibilities or were
22 you dedicated to that area with MPOG?

23 A. I was originally dedicated to that. Before the end of my
24 time there, we were kind of venturing out and assisting other
25 assets.

1 Q. Okay. All right. Great. So, now that we have some
2 understanding of your background, I just -- I wanted to go through
3 the day of the accident with you. If you could just start -- give
4 us a summary of, you know, what time you started work, what your
5 responsibilities were that day, and then -- and a little more
6 detail to the extent that you remember when there was a request
7 from the control room, if there was any indication that there
8 might be something that wasn't working correctly and if there was
9 any indication that there might have been a spill. Can you just
10 walk us through and take as much time as you want, going into as
11 much detail as you can remember? I'd really appreciate just
12 hearing your account of what you recall from that day.

13 A. Okay. So, the original call was around 10 o'clock. That
14 next day, I was just -- I planned on going to the office, you
15 know, being towards the end of the month. We just verify all our
16 paperwork and extra stuff was done. Well, anyway, at 10 o'clock
17 that night, I get a phone call from the control room. He said
18 that we were having some lower, lower pressures on the pipeline.
19 So I asked him about what the pressure was. I wish I did remember
20 what the pressures they were. I don't remember. I think they
21 were in the 400, 500 range psi which is common for us. We had
22 been having higher than normal, around 700 psi pressure because of
23 some pumps being downstream with a fault. So everybody was kind
24 of just gathering that the line pressure tends to get a little
25 higher when the pumps aren't running.

1 Well, he called me, just out of precaution. He asked if I
2 can call the Crescent operator which that is who we tie into. We
3 tie into a Crescent pipeline. So he called their control room and
4 I called the actual operator asking if he can go take a look
5 around, and he did. He went and verified his flow rates, our flow
6 rates, our pressures, his pressures, and everything looked
7 completely normal. We typically have a differential pressure 40
8 or so psi, and that's about what we had coming in and the flow
9 rate we had coming in matched what he had coming out.

10 So after that phone call, I called back to my control room.
11 Spoke with him. He had spoken the operator, and he confirmed with
12 the Crescent operator, operations control room, and everything
13 looked normal. So I asked him to -- if there was any more issues,
14 don't hesitate to give me a call. And I would be prepared to go
15 to, you know, onsite in the morning if I needed to just to put
16 some more eyes on the system.

17 And, he called me around 1 o'clock in the morning. He said
18 that the pressure was still kind of on the trend down, but it was
19 going up and down. The pressure itself was going up and down.
20 And what he did, he went ahead and he closed all the meter runs
21 except for one of them, and just because of the volume that we
22 have going through the line, he didn't want to take any chances of
23 it spiking up too fast for pressure-wise. So what he did, he
24 closed all the meters that we had open except for one of them, and
25 the pressure went up about 100 or so psi in a matter of minutes

1 which is pretty normal for us. If that's with the lower
2 pressures, it's not as fast (ph.) as much.

3 So I said if you've got any more issues, let me know but what
4 we'll do is, I told him, I'll be -- I'll for sure and make a trip
5 down to Main Pass 69 and make sure that the, you know, the meters
6 were working. Just because he had, he had a meter issue that it
7 seemed like one of flow rates, just one, I think it was one of the
8 meters slowed down, but in the past, we've had some, we've had
9 some paraffin and debris issues from some pigging we were doing.

10 So he then again called the Crescent control room because he
11 checked the flow rates and pressures, and everything still looked
12 good. We still had that higher differential pressure on our side.
13 We were still high when the guys were connected to, which was
14 Crescent. And, so I told him just because of this line imbalance
15 we had, I said, hey, look, man, I'll just -- I'll go in the
16 morning. We've probably got some clogged meters. I'll go check
17 the strainers. We'll do some meter proving just to make sure
18 everything's good. And I told him, any more problems, give me a
19 call in the morning.

20 So I went to bed, and I work up at 5:45 and got dressed.
21 And I was -- I called the control room. I spoke with him again,
22 and he said the pressure was still down but the only issue was
23 they were having some issues with the meter block valve. It
24 didn't close or he couldn't operate them. I don't want to say
25 closed. They couldn't operate them, and he said that the flow

1 rate just died within a matter of minutes.

2 So, I then called my supervisor, told him what was going on.
3 I then -- as soon as I spoke with him, I explained to him what
4 happened through the night, and I called my control room right
5 back, and at that time, it was shut in. They shut in the pipeline
6 at that time. And, I still continued my way to Main Pass 69. We
7 stopped to try to fly but we couldn't because of the weather. So
8 we took a boat to Main Pass 69. And then that's kind of -- that's
9 basically it.

10 Q. All right. Thank you.

11 A. I'm trying to think. I don't know the timeline of -- I know
12 they were shut in at 6, just after 6 o'clock, and I don't know at
13 what point the pressure really started to fall because I was --
14 like I said, I was in transit. So I wasn't able to -- I wasn't
15 speaking with anyone or whatever about that stuff.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. And that's pretty much it.

18 Q. So, what was your schedule that day?

19 A. The day before or --

20 Q. On the 15th, November 15th, the day before they shut in the
21 line.

22 A. That day I believe we were in the office I believe. I'm
23 trying to remember.

24 Q. So at 10, at 10 when you got the call from the control room,
25 were you at home or were you working at that time?

1 A. I was at home.

2 Q. At home. Okay. So what's your normal shift? What hours do
3 you normally work?

4 A. 6 to 4.

5 Q. 6 to 4.

6 A. 6 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. Or it depends. They're pretty lenient. Like if I need to go
9 in at 7 for some odd reason, it's 7 to 5. Typical 10 hour days.

10 Q. Okay. And so on the 15th, that day before they called you,
11 you think you were in the office that day. But when they actually
12 called you the first time at 10 p.m., you were at home. You
13 weren't working.

14 A. Right.

15 Q. And then they called you again around 1 a.m. You're still at
16 home. And then you were heading into work that morning when a
17 decision was made to shut in the line.

18 A. Correct.

19 Q. And were you part of that decision?

20 A. No, that was decision was made by -- oh, man. I don't want
21 to speak on that. I don't know who made that decision.

22 Q. But you weren't involved.

23 A. I was going to call back. Yeah, I was going to call back and
24 see and speak with their supervisor which I don't remember -- I
25 don't who was on to decide if we wanted to shut it in or not.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. But they -- on the information that I was given, and the fact
3 that it was -- we were talking directly with someone that ties
4 directly into that meter skid, and everything was normal from the
5 time period that I saw it, we didn't indicate any leak, especially
6 considering the little standup test he did with pressuring the
7 line back up.

8 Q. So when you were going through the summary, you said the
9 meter runs, all but one meter run was closed. I'm not sure I
10 understand what that means. Can you explain what that means?

11 A. Sure. So there's -- on that meter skid, there's six meters.
12 We typically flow through three at a time for the volume we had
13 coming through the line. And what he did, he basically just
14 closed off two meters runs and was flowing through just one meter
15 run.

16 Q. Oh, I see.

17 A. I don't know which meter runs he was flowing through, but he
18 was flowing through only one meter run. Basically -- he was
19 basically holding back pressure on the line to see if we would get
20 a spike or not.

21 Q. And the meter run would have been at Main Pass 69?

22 A. Correct.

23 Q. Okay. So there's a meter skid at Main Pass 69 that has six
24 runs. He closed five of them to see if he was getting similar
25 readings or a pressure spike?

1 A. Well, I think he closed two. I think he closed two, because
2 we typically flow through three at a time.

3 Q. Oh, okay. That's helpful. Thank you. I didn't understand
4 that, but now I'm with you.

5 A. No problem.

6 Q. Okay. And then you said you called your supervisor in the
7 morning after you -- I think you said you called your supervisor
8 after you woke up around 5:45 or so. Who was your supervisor?

9 A. Allen Moreau.

10 Q. Allen -- can you spell that last name?

11 A. M-o-r-e-a-u, I believe.

12 Q. Okay. That's all the questions I have for now. I'm going to
13 turn it over to Dane.

14 A. Okay.

15 MS. LYONS: Dane, you're on mute, if you have any questions.

16 MR. SPILLERS: Oh, I'm sorry. I don't think I have any
17 questions at this time.

18 MS. LYONS: Okay. Steve.

19 DR. JENNER: All right. Thank you. This is Steve Jenner.

20 BY DR. JENNER:

21 Q. A couple questions. Thanks for your summary. I appreciate
22 that. I'm just going to bounce around a bit. When you're at
23 home, what technology, what equipment do you have to be able to
24 see your system or --

25 A. I actually did not have my laptop. It was at the office. I

1 think it was updating there. So I left there. I rely on the
2 control room's information.

3 Q. The information from which control room?

4 A. Our OCC, Third Coast control room.

5 Q. Okay. So part of your conversation back and forth is you
6 were asking for various data from the controller. Is that Cesar?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Okay. But you don't have any equipment in front of you to do
9 your own assessment. Is that right at that time?

10 A. Correct.

11 Q. Okay. If you did have your laptop, is there any resources
12 you could have used, anything that you would have referenced to
13 help, you know, diagnose what's going on?

14 A. I would have looked at the same SCADA Cesar would have been
15 looking at. I don't have any additional -- anything additional to
16 look at that he cannot see.

17 Q. Okay. So you're now from home making calls to technicians at
18 various onsite locations. Can you walk me through the process of
19 their checking meters and equipment? What does that involve?

20 A. So the operator at Main Pass 69, he just would do a visual
21 walkthrough of the meters and whatnot there to make sure he didn't
22 see anything visually leaking and whatever. Then the other
23 information came from the Crescent control room. That's where my
24 control room and his control room.

25 Q. Can you give me a little background about the Crescent

1 control room? How -- what do they do and what sort of interaction
2 did they have with like, you know, Cesar's control room?

3 A. I don't want to speak on that. I'm not sure. I know, I know
4 they rely on each other I guess because we tie directly into their
5 meter skid from our meter skids. So I guess that's it. I really
6 don't want to misspeak on anybody else's behalf of what they did
7 exactly because obviously I wasn't there to witness that kind of
8 -- those conversations. I'd rather not speak on something I don't
9 fully understand as far as interactions between control rooms.

10 Q. I appreciate that. Thank you. But in your normal course of
11 action, do you normally have communications with Crescent? Is
12 that part of your daily activities?

13 A. No. They just -- they have a guy that stays onsite and
14 whatnot, where the Main Pass 69 meter skid is.

15 Q. Okay. Were you -- at any point when you're talking to Cesar,
16 you know, everything as you're explaining to us, sounds like we
17 checked something and it's normal. Later you checked something,
18 it's normal. What sense did you get from his perspective? Was
19 he, was he satisfied with what you were reporting back or did he
20 continue to have concerns?

21 A. Well, at first I know we had some concerns but once -- I
22 guess that concern kind of died when we did that -- he did the
23 little standup test, bumping the pressure up. But like I said,
24 after that I had, I had no communications from 1 o'clock until
25 5:45 or whatever time I called the control room back.

1 Q. Okay. You're calling that the standup test?

2 A. I guess just to make sure we would build pressure.

3 Q. So this is a test to build up pressure?

4 A. Right.

5 Q. And from the results of that, were you satisfied with what
6 you saw? Was Cesar satisfied with the results?

7 A. From the -- typically, you know, if they, for whatever reason
8 I would have to hold back pressure on the line for meter provings
9 or for flow rates or whatever, that was sufficient. I've seen
10 that many times before that we've had, you know, we've done
11 standup tests for whatever reason. Like I said, I don't want to
12 speak on anything that happened a long time ago. But, yeah, for
13 the pressures we had for it to build 100 psi that quickly, that
14 was pretty normal operations but a normal rate should I say for
15 the line.

16 Q. Okay. So, did you have any concerns? You talked to Cesar
17 maybe three times or four times. Did anyone of those -- besides
18 the last conversation where they started to shut things down, did
19 you have any concerns yourself? Did you think that other testing
20 needed to take place?

21 A. I hate to misstate, but I don't think the -- like I said,
22 based on the information I was given, it seemed, it seemed okay.
23 It didn't -- we didn't have any real indication of a leak I guess.
24 If I had the indication of a leak, I wouldn't hesitate to shut it
25 in as I've done it before. I've shut it in. I've shut the whole

1 system in and I wasn't worried about repercussions or anything for
2 shutting it in. But I would -- like I said, if I had an
3 indication or a worry of shutting it in, I would have in a
4 heartbeat.

5 Q. I'll ask you from the vantage of being able to think back on
6 it, you know, of a week or so ago, but is there any other
7 information that could have been sought at the time to help
8 diagnose the problem?

9 A. I'm really not sure.

10 Q. Okay. Can you walk me through -- you mentioned in the past
11 you've had to shut down a system. Can you just summarize that
12 event, how you came to that decision?

13 A. Well, had a significant pressure drop in the line. That
14 happened, oh, man, I don't remember what year it was. We actually
15 did have a line leak. So when I got the phone call, I didn't
16 hesitate, and I told everyone -- I told the control room to call
17 everybody and shut them in. And we were shut in within I think it
18 was 7 minutes or 14 minutes or something like that. So like I
19 said, if I had an indication of a leak, I would shut it in.

20 Q. All right. Thank you for that. Now, I know that's a big
21 decision to make, you know, in terms of shutting down operations.
22 What sort of instructions or training do you get to make that
23 decision?

24 A. I don't want to say I got specific training, just normal
25 operations stuff, just communication-wise through employment or

1 through my employer or employers. I --

2 Q. Do you -- I'm sorry. Go on.

3 A. No, no, I apologize. I don't want to say the wrong thing
4 here. Let me think. So I got -- I didn't want to say anything.
5 Let me gather my thoughts real quick. Like I said, I don't want
6 to misspeak on it.

7 Q. That's fine.

8 A. I would say that I never had -- I wouldn't say I had ample
9 formal, you know, in school training. I was, I was brought on
10 with a contractors and I worked with a guy for a while that ran
11 the system, and I seen the system all the time. So, based on
12 information I got, or the information that I was given, and
13 understanding what I know about the line, I felt the decision I
14 made wouldn't impact in the way it was -- or it wouldn't -- I
15 wasn't -- the line wasn't in the condition that it really was in,
16 if that a fair statement of how I feel about it.

17 Q. Okay. Thank you. Thank you for that. Can you -- let me
18 just change pace a little. I'm just interested in your work
19 schedule. Let me ask you a question before that. You were called
20 at -- I think you said you were called about 10 o'clock that
21 evening. You were off duty. This is Wednesday, the 15th.

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. Why were you called if you were off duty? Is there someone
24 else who could have been called that was on duty?

25 A. No. We kind of just kind of take turns taking phone calls,

1 myself and a coworker.

2 Q. So no one is typically on duty in the evening. You just
3 rotate who's --

4 A. Correct.

5 Q. -- going to take a call. Okay. So that was normal --

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. -- to take a call while you're home?

8 A. Correct.

9 Q. Okay. If you would walk me through. So you were -- like
10 what your schedule was for Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, what
11 days you worked and what hours?

12 A. Oh, goodness. I've (indiscernible) time since then. Oh,
13 man. Shucks. I don't have any access to any of that any more to
14 even give you an idea. I really -- man, I can't remember.

15 Q. It sounds like you worked that morning and then -- Wednesday
16 morning, you went off duty.

17 A. Yeah, I was, I was -- I believe we were at the office. Yeah,
18 we were at the office that Wednesday but before that, the Tuesday
19 I think we had -- I had a hazmat training, a hazmat refresher.
20 And that Monday -- oh, man. I really don't remember about Monday.

21 Q. Well, do you have normal like days off?

22 A. Yes, typically Friday, Saturday, Sunday. We work 4 - 10s.

23 Q. Okay. That helps. So chances are you were working Monday,
24 Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, your normal schedule.

25 A. Yeah, that was my normal schedule. Now, what I did those

1 days, I don't remember exactly.

2 Q. No, that's fine. That's fine. And when I put on my human
3 performance hat, can I just ask, you know, your overall health?
4 Do you have any colds or allergies or anything like that going
5 into work on Wednesday?

6 A. No.

7 Q. Okay. Is your overall health pretty good?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. And do -- how's your sleep?

10 A. It was good until you lose your job, and you've got a family.
11 That's what I think. I guess you understand that.

12 Q. Yeah. I do. I understand you were asked to provide
13 specimens for post-toxicological testing. Is that right?

14 A. Yeah, that is correct.

15 Q. When did that occur?

16 A. That occurred Thursday.

17 Q. How do -- I'm sorry. Go on. Thursday, the approximate time
18 and location.

19 A. Approximate time, hmm. I'm trying to remember what time it
20 was. It was, it was -- oh, man. I'm guessing 4, 4 o'clock.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. At the Port Sulphur, Port Sulphur Hospital. I think it's
23 Port Sulphur Hospital is what it's called.

24 Q. And was that for urine and did they give you a breathalyzer?

25 A. No, just urine test.

1 Q. Okay. All right. Thank you for that. Now, here's a
2 sensitive question. You know, I'm sorry to hear that you lost
3 your position. What conversation did you have about that? And
4 what reason were you given for losing your job?

5 A. I wasn't given a reason. I was told based on their
6 investigation. That's it. And all contact stopped at that point.
7 The Friday -- so Thursday, by 9 o'clock, we had -- around 9
8 o'clock or so, we had a phone call. They told me I was on leave
9 until further notice. They were going to do an internal
10 investigation, and they were going to let me know something. On
11 Friday, I was called and told I was terminated effective
12 immediately. And I was no longer allowed on the premises, Third
13 Coast and whatnot.

14 Q. Who was a part of that conversation you had right there?

15 A. Allen Moreau, Robert Billeck and our HR lady, Ms. Scotty
16 (ph.) -- I don't remember here last name. I'd have to go back and
17 look.

18 Q. So no -- at any point during the conversation they said, they
19 said due to your -- from our investigation, we're going to make
20 this decision. Did they give any specifics? We think that you
21 should have done this or you should not have done that or any
22 details?

23 A. No, no details. None.

24 Q. When you reflect back on your decision and actions, can you
25 think of any reason they would have done that?

1 A. I really don't know. So on the ride home, my supervisor is
2 the one that picked me up, that brought me to the hospital to go
3 get the drug test or the drug screen I should say and brought me
4 all the way home which is a long ride. And I explained to him
5 what I thought and the reason I made my decision, and he said that
6 he explained that to his superiors and according to him, he said
7 he understood why I made the decision. And when I tell you it's a
8 long ride, it's probably 2 1/2 hours. So we had a long time to
9 reflect on it, just him and I.

10 Q. Thank you for sharing that. That's all the questions I have
11 for you. Thank you.

12 MS. LYONS: All right. Karen, do you have any questions?

13 MS. BUTLER: I do. Thank you so much for the opportunity.

14 BY MS. BUTLER:

15 Q. I really appreciate being able to talk to you about what
16 happened because it helps fill in some missing points for us. And
17 if at any point my voice starts to tail off, will you please let
18 me know if you're having trouble hearing?

19 A. Sure.

20 Q. Is there anything that you found different about your
21 interactions for Cesar that night?

22 A. No.

23 Q. You have worked with him before on calls. Is that right?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Okay. And, is there anything that you would have asked in

1 hindsight of him or believe he should have communicated to you?

2 A. Oh, man. That's a hard one to say.

3 Q. Could you repeat that?

4 A. Sorry. That's a hard one to kind of go back and say what you
5 would have done different, you know. The situation, for what I
6 seen, in hindsight, I mean there's always a million questions,
7 right.

8 Q. Exactly.

9 A. Specifically I really don't know. I don't want to say I
10 would have done this but --

11 Q. Okay. So, with these --

12 A. I'm --

13 Q. Go ahead.

14 A. -- not really not sure.

15 Q. Go ahead.

16 A. I'm not really sure what I can say in hindsight.

17 Q. Okay. Well, that means that maybe there's no one thing that
18 stands out. So with Cesar, I guess I would ask, did he relay at
19 the very beginning of the call an imbalance difference or did he
20 just talk pressures? Do you remember that?

21 A. I don't remember the first call. I know the second one, I
22 remember hearing about an imbalance. It was 1 o'clock in the
23 morning. I really don't remember those little details of the
24 call.

25 Q. Okay. At least we think at 1 o'clock he was exchanging

1 imbalance information.

2 A. Yes. I just don't know -- I don't remember how much it was.

3 Q. On the imbalance information, would they shared that only in
4 relationship to say MP69 or would they have done that with you in
5 segments? Like for one segment of the pipeline versus another.

6 A. No. It would have been Main Pass 69. I don't know if I can
7 remember all the little details. I'm sorry.

8 Q. That's okay.

9 A. As far as I look back on it. I don't remember them details.
10 But like I said before, we've had, we've had meter issues in the
11 past with paraffin and stuff that's clogged up our meters, and
12 we've had to go out and pull the meters and we found debris in the
13 meters that flowed, the meters causing imbalances. The imbalance
14 thing, we've had before. And it was, it was a meter issue. And
15 then I know for like a storm one time, we weren't showing any
16 incoming stuff in Main Pass 69 due to PLC issues. Now, the meters
17 themselves were counting, but it wasn't related to the PLC.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. So we didn't see that information. So, you know, in the past
20 we've had that imbalance issue but it was always a meter issue or
21 a strainer issue.

22 Q. Okay. All right. So, do you do anything with the PLCs at
23 various locations?

24 A. No, I don't do any PLC work, no.

25 Q. Okay. Do you know anything about the programming that might

1 automatically close valves at MP69 upon say a drop in flow or
2 pressure?

3 A. Yes. So I know that if they drop below 100 psi -- not psi.
4 I'm sorry, 100 barrels per hour, I don't know the timeframe, but
5 they do close.

6 Q. Do you --

7 A. I don't remember the exact, I don't remember the exact, 1
8 minute, 2 minutes, 3 minutes. I don't remember the exact
9 timeframe.

10 Q. Okay. Do you know what valves close?

11 A. No, I do not.

12 Q. Okay. Is there -- is that something that on a walk around,
13 if valves were closed in positions, that the Crescent individual
14 would relay to anyone?

15 A. I think if we ask him to go look at the valves, yes. But,
16 based on what we saw, we still have flow rate coming through the
17 meters from my -- from the time I spoke with the control room
18 around 10 o'clock and around the 1 o'clock time, we had flow rates
19 going through the meters.

20 Q. And are there more than your meters for Crescent at that
21 location?

22 A. Yes. Crescent has --

23 Q. Do you know?

24 A. Crescent has a meter skid that we tie directly into. That's
25 where we got the flow rates from as far as our flow rates and

1 their flow rates. Now, specific numbers, I never got the specific
2 flow rates that I remember. But, from what I understood when I
3 spoke with the control room, that everything was normal --

4 Q. Okay. Do --

5 A. -- for --

6 Q. Do you know --

7 A. -- flow rate-wise.

8 Q. Do you know if Crescent receives anyone but you through that
9 meter skid?

10 A. I think they have more producers into that line, yes.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. But I don't know who or how many. I don't know any of their
13 specifics.

14 Q. Okay. So, when you talk to a tech about looking at something
15 at 69, do you give direction on I only want you to look at meter
16 523 or whatever number it might happen to be and they take that
17 direction from you or do they typically know which ones are your
18 meters and they relay that volume back only to you? How does that
19 work?

20 A. So if you didn't (indiscernible) the operator that went out,
21 he didn't look at volumes. He just went to do a visual overview
22 as far as the field guy. He would be the one that would make an
23 actual look at the meter skid and the piping, interference in
24 piping around the area to make sure he didn't see anything.

25 Q. Okay. So as far as you know --

1 A. For the control room, I'm not sure what -- obviously I'm not
2 sure what interaction and stuff between our control room and their
3 control room was.

4 Q. All right. Thanks you so much for that. You're helping to
5 clarify that it was visual only on the field's behalf, and we
6 don't really know what all the communication was with the
7 controllers, two control rooms, but we do know that there's more
8 than one set of meters that Crescent has at MP69. So they're not
9 only all MPOG. Is that a fair restatement?

10 A. Yes. We have our own. Each -- we each have our own meter
11 skid.

12 Q. Okay. All right. So I'm going to shift gears just a little
13 bit to make sure I understand some things that you told us, and
14 forgive me for not tracking it clearly. When you're on call, and
15 you rotate on call, are you rotating by the week or are you
16 rotating by the night or how does that work?

17 A. It's real -- it's no real formal rotation. If he would have
18 called my opposite, he would have called my opposite. I don't
19 want to say we have an actual rotation for on call and not on
20 call.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. I don't want to say it was luck of the draw, because it
23 wasn't luck of the draw. But had he called my coworker, I'm not
24 sure if my coworker would have called me. I don't know if my
25 coworker would have, you know. I'm not sure.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. I can't speak on what he would do or wouldn't do.

3 Q. So it sounds like both of you understand that you can receive
4 a call from the control room at any time, and you're expected to
5 answer.

6 A. Correct.

7 Q. Okay. Do you know for your prior week, had you had any night
8 call outs? So that Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday --

9 A. I don't, I don't know. I don't think so.

10 Q. All right. We understood that there had been some
11 communication in the past about transmitters. Is that ringing a
12 bell at all for any discussion that had happened?

13 A. Transmitters.

14 Q. Yeah, transmitters.

15 A. Well, I'm not sure. What about them?

16 Q. Okay. Transmitter failures or drift (ph.) or issues like
17 that. Is that ringing a bell at all or --

18 A. No, it's not.

19 Q. Are you familiar with any process where a pressure or a flow
20 is no longer being received from a point that they would just
21 force in a value?

22 A. No. I don't know of anything like that. And I wouldn't, I
23 wouldn't make that -- just on a limb, I wouldn't expect my control
24 room to do something like that. Just how I know the guys, just
25 from the past working with them, I would not expect them to do

1 anything like that.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. I wouldn't do, I wouldn't do such a thing. The only time you
4 force a number is if you're going to test, you know, test the
5 value. You force it up with the pump to check it, you know, make
6 sure it's reading right, but other than that, I would never expect
7 my control room to force any numbers.

8 Q. Okay. Do you remember seeing any data from MP123?

9 A. No.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. But now, what do you mean data or when or what?

12 Q. It could be flow coming in. It could be a pressure. It
13 could be online or offline, any data from MP123.

14 A. Specific to a date or at any time?

15 Q. It could be any time.

16 A. Yeah, we -- I believe we see their flow rate and their
17 volume.

18 Q. Okay. And if something were to have changed in a system, are
19 you -- do you receive notification of the change, documentation or
20 information that's presented to you that something's going to be
21 changed out or planned to be replaced or coming online?

22 A. Onsite (indiscernible)?

23 Q. It could be onsite.

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Go ahead.

1 A. Like I guess if, if the platform was (indiscernible), they
2 say they were going to come online, they would typically call the
3 control room, not myself.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Typically the producers would speak directly with the control
6 room for that kind of stuff.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. For any kind of change like that. Now, if it was something
9 we were involved in, which I've never changed -- I've never had to
10 do anything for a MOC for this company.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. We haven't changed anything other like in kind stuff that
13 doesn't require the MOC.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Hold on for one second. I need to ask my son a question. He
16 just got home. Hold on for one second, okay.

17 Q. No problem.

18 A. Sorry about that.

19 Q. No problem whatsoever. So we kind of were talking change,
20 changes that you may have been aware of on the system, and we
21 talked about the fact that there wasn't anything recent that you
22 recalled. Is that a fair summary?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Okay. And, do you know how long say milepost -- or I'm
25 sorry. MP, forgive me for that. I knew I was going to do it at

1 least once.

2 A. (Indiscernible).

3 Q. Main Pass 123, do you know how long that particular point may
4 have been in play?

5 A. Oh, I don't remember when they tied into our line, what year
6 that was. I don't remember.

7 Q. Quite a while ago.

8 A. Yes, it's not like it's the last 2 years. It's been more
9 than that. I don't want to say a date or time because I really
10 don't remember.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. And I don't have any documentation to look to tell you a
13 date.

14 Q. That's quite all right. That gives me a ballpark. That
15 gives me a ballpark of that. And thanks for that. So I think
16 it's my understanding that we're picking at PLCs at five
17 locations, ML127.

18 A. MP127.

19 Q. Um-hum. I said -- oh, thank you for the correction.

20 A. Okay.

21 Q. MP225.

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. MP281.

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. BK823.

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. And MP69.

3 A. Yes, ma'am.

4 Q. Is there PLCs anywhere else that you can think of?

5 A. Yes, there's one at Main Pass 144.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. I say PLC. I mean each location has a PLC. They tie into
8 the main line.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. Main Pass 144 and -- did you say 123? I don't remember if
11 you did or not.

12 Q. I did not. That's why I was curious.

13 A. 123.

14 Q. Okay. Thank you. So there's at least a tie in, but whether
15 or not there's the PLC per se transmitting that may be going --

16 A. Yeah, there's meters --

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. There's meters and like I say, we see their flow rates and
19 stuff like that at each location --

20 Q. Okay.

21 (Crosstalk)

22 Q. Okay. All right. So I think with that, you've clarified for
23 me some of the things that I needed to understand. And it sounds
24 like we have a little more information about the schedule you
25 would work. And we don't think there were major calls before this

1 night, and is there anything else that you think, regarding the
2 communications with the control room or maybe the fact that you
3 didn't have your laptop, that was different about this night?

4 A. No, ma'am. No, ma'am. Nothing different. It was a normal
5 -- I thought it was going to be a normal workday. It turned out
6 to be a nightmare.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. I'm just being honest. I thought it was going to be a normal
9 workday.

10 Q. And so are you -- is it typical for you not to have your
11 laptop? That's not an abnormal thing or is that a one off?

12 A. Very seldom do I not have my laptop. It's very seldom. If I
13 remember right, I think my computer was updating. I don't
14 remember exactly why I left it at the office, but I typically
15 bring it with me because if say for any reason I need to make a
16 run to Main Pass 69 in the morning or to the heliport, I don't
17 have to drive all the way to the office to go get my computer.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. That's the only reason I typically have my computer, just so
20 I don't have to go 30 minutes out of my way to the office or 20
21 minutes, excuse me, to the office.

22 Q. All right. I'm going to hand it back to others. Thank you
23 so much.

24 A. You're welcome.

25 BY MS. LYONS:

1 Q. All right. This is Sara Lyons. I'm going to ask a couple of
2 follow-up questions. I don't have a lot for you as far as follow
3 up. Okay. So when you were going over your responsibilities, I
4 think you said your job title was a pipeline operator now, and it
5 had been a measurement tech. Do you ever work in the control
6 room?

7 A. No, I haven't.

8 Q. So as a pipeline operator, to what extent are you responsible
9 for determining whether there is a leak on the pipeline or not?
10 Is that part of your job?

11 A. I would say no. I've never really -- other than the one time
12 we did have to shut it in for that leak, as far as control room
13 duties, I didn't have any control room duties.

14 Q. So are you -- I know Steve asked you a little bit about
15 training, but were you -- it sounded like you had done a lot of
16 on-the-job training on these MPOG assets through your time there
17 as a contractor and as a Third Coast employee, but were you
18 specifically trained on how to recognize whether there might be a
19 leak on the line?

20 A. We did some visual stuff as far as like some visual training
21 we did, and other than that, not really, no.

22 Q. When you say visual training, what does that mean?

23 A. We did a -- what's that word? I'm sorry. I'm trying to
24 remember what it was called. We did a training for what you would
25 do in response to a spill is what we did for that, for situations,

1 yes.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. It's for no specific -- if there's a specific number, say,
4 hey, we're under this third percentage, we need, we need to shut
5 in or whatever, I've never received anything like that, no. I'm
6 just using that as an understanding of what I was trained for.
7 You know, like I did my DOT (ph.) certification for like valves
8 and valve inspections and all that stuff but no specific for that.

9 Q. Okay. So you were trained on what to do in response to a
10 spill. What would be your role in that capacity?

11 A. I would be a field guy, going to pull valves if need be and
12 just onsite stuff.

13 Q. And if that were the situation --

14 A. I have no QI roles -- I'm sorry.

15 Q. No, go ahead.

16 A. I have -- yeah, I have no QI roles or anything like that. I
17 would just be a field guy on the location if I needed to or
18 whatever I was instructed to do.

19 Q. Okay. So you would have been following instructions. Who
20 would have been giving you the instructions on what to do?

21 A. I'm guessing my supervisor or whoever would be the QI, the
22 qualified individual for the company, but I'm sure it was directed
23 down to my supervisor for whatever, you know, for what I needed to
24 do.

25 Q. Oh, I see. Okay. So you mentioned that before you had, you

1 had noticed an indication of a potential leak, and you had
2 actually made the call to shut in the pipeline based on a pressure
3 drop. How did you, how did you become the person to see that
4 information?

5 A. That day I was -- that was a long time ago. That was quite a
6 few years. I was just called, and I was told, hey, we had a
7 significant pressure drop on MPOG. I don't know the information,
8 but based on the information that I did receive from that specific
9 phone call, I made the decision to shut it in.

10 Q. Okay. And then who did you tell that to?

11 A. The control room that called -- when they called me.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. The control room called me and told me what happened, and I
14 told them shut it in.

15 Q. Oh, okay. So based on the drop in pressure, you recognized
16 that as a potential indication of a leak. Are there other things
17 that you might look for a potential indication of a leak?

18 A. I mean in hindsight, there was many things you know you want
19 to look for, but I guess because of our past issues that we've had
20 with the meters and what we've had for pressures and whatnot,
21 everything seemed to have been a normal operating pressure for
22 us --

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. -- at the time of this incident.

25 Q. Okay. And then on the day of this accident, I know you were

1 called at home and you were called late at night a couple of
2 times. What were you to do specifically? Were you asked to
3 confirm the validity of the instrumentation, of the meters or what
4 was your role there? What were you trying to answer? What
5 question were you trying to answer?

6 A. I guess maybe just some guidance on what was going on,
7 although I wasn't onsite at Main Pass 69. So I gave the best
8 information or the best answer based on the information that I
9 understood.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. I guess I was looking at the right statements.

12 Q. Okay. And would there be circumstances where they call you
13 at 10 p.m. and like do you have the authority to decide, oh, I'm
14 going to go to Main Pass 69 right now and look at it myself? Is
15 that within your authority or how is --

16 A. If it was instance where I think I should have to go right
17 away, I would call my supervisor and say, hey, look, but at 1 in
18 the morning, we cannot fly, and I'm sure they wouldn't want me to
19 take a boat just to go make a visual.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. But -- yeah.

22 Q. Okay. And so the person at Crescent that you had talked to,
23 is that someone that you've worked with before?

24 A. Yeah, he's one of their -- he's one of the Crescent
25 operators.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. He's been there for a little while.

3 Q. So is he your counterpart at the facility, and they have --
4 it sounded like they have someone that's staffing that facility 24
5 hours a day?

6 A. Correct.

7 Q. Okay. Where Third Coast didn't have someone on site. So you
8 were relying on that relationship and their expertise there. Is
9 that correct?

10 A. I would say mostly just for a visual, yes. For like a visual
11 leak on the line or anything that's leaking should I say on that
12 line visually. As far as going to our meters or our valves and
13 stuff, they don't do that.

14 Q. Okay. So --

15 A. That's why we have the remote control in our control room.

16 Q. Okay. That makes sense to me. Do you know what that
17 person's name was?

18 A. I believe it was Larry.

19 Q. Larry.

20 A. Uh-huh. I'm trying to remember his last name. Oh, man. I
21 think it's Larry Bowman.

22 Q. Do you know how to spell that?

23 A. B-o-w-m-a-n.

24 Q. Bowman. Okay. Perfect. And that's all the questions I have
25 for you.

1 MS. LYONS: Does anyone have additional questions for Ernie?

2 MS. BUTLER: Can I possibly get three follow ups? Dane, if
3 you had something, I wanted to let you first.

4 MR. SPILLERS: Yeah, I do have just --

5 MS. BUTLER: I saw Steve wave now. Go ahead.

6 BY MR. SPILLERS:

7 Q. Yeah, I have a brief question. Are any of the meter skid at
8 MP69, you said there are six meters and you normally operate on
9 three of those. Are the three remaining meters just standby
10 meters that you would switch or do they automatically switch
11 during a high flow or --

12 A. No.

13 Q. -- high pressures?

14 A. Usually we'd have to have really a lot of flow coming in for
15 to have more than three meters open. But, they can control how
16 they want over through the control room.

17 Q. Okay. So SCADA would control there. They're not MPOG.
18 They're not local control or automatically switch on or anything.

19 A. Correct. Yeah, there's no like auto sequence or anything on
20 those, on those meters.

21 Q. Okay. Yeah, that's the only question I had. Thank you.

22 BY MS. BUTLER:

23 Q. Can you explain as part of your training or as part of your
24 experience on the system, is there any one place on the system
25 that you know they've experienced backflow --

1 A. Backflow?

2 Q. -- where there's potentially -- yeah. There's potentially
3 been an issue where flow was actually coming off the pipeline
4 going somewhere else because of some configuration?

5 A. No, nothing that I know of, no.

6 Q. Okay. All right. And then I know that we talked about the
7 valves not operating towards the end of the controller's shift,
8 and you mentioned that as well. Is that a common issue or is that
9 an abnormal issue?

10 A. That's -- it's definitely not a common issue. We've always
11 had pretty good control of our valves there remotely.

12 Q. Okay. And if the controller had told you at any time during
13 the night that MP69 was showing zero flow, did he communicate that
14 or did he ever exchange that information?

15 A. I don't remember the zero flow except for that morning. I
16 don't want to say he did or he didn't because like I said, it's 1
17 in the morning, you know. You wake up getting a phone call. I
18 can't say yes or no on that.

19 Q. Okay. Just not sure. Would that have been a trigger of any
20 type for you?

21 A. If I had seen some zero flow rate, yeah. That and a negative
22 pressure drop, that all would have indicated a major pressure
23 drop.

24 Q. Okay. So you were looking --

25 A. In the past we've had meter issues. Our meters have clogged

1 up and stuff causing an imbalance for volume-wise.

2 Q. And others may know this answer, but did -- was there any
3 recent pig run that you were aware of?

4 A. No, but we did have a lot of debris come through the lines,
5 and we've had also paraffin as (indiscernible), you know, the
6 paraffin tends to drop out a little bit more this time of year in
7 this oil. So we could have, like I said, I truly thought it was
8 either a meter or strainer issue, just based on the fact that we
9 didn't have any significant pressure drop.

10 Q. That's it. Thank you for clarifying those.

11 BY MS. LYONS:

12 Q. All right. Thanks again, Ernie, for interviewing with us.
13 Before we conclude, is there anything unusual that you can think
14 of, anything that you think might have -- might be important to
15 this accident that we haven't discussed today already?

16 A. No, ma'am, nothing I can think of.

17 MS. LYONS: Okay. We'll go off the record.

18 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

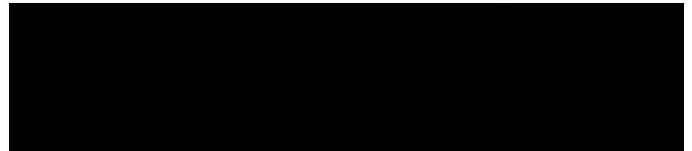
IN THE MATTER OF: PIPELINE LEAK OFF THE LOUISIANA
COAST IN THE GULF OF MEXICO
ON NOVEMBER 16, 2023
Interview of Ernest Bourgeois

ACCIDENT NO.: PLD24FR001

PLACE: via Microsoft Teams

DATE: November 28, 2023

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.



Kathryn A. Mirfin
Transcriber