



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
Investigative Hearing

Norfolk Southern Railway general merchandise freight train 32N
derailment with subsequent hazardous material release and fires,
in East Palestine, Ohio, on February 3, 2023

GROUP	G
EXHIBIT	
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Agency / Organization

NTSB

Title

**Interview Transcript – Keith Drabick,
Chief, East Palestine Fire Department,
February 16, 2023**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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NORFOLK SOUTHERN TRAIN DERAILMENT
IN EAST PALESTINE, OHIO
ON FEBRUARY 3, 2023

Accident No.: RRD23MR005

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Interview of: KEITH DRABICK, Fire Chief
East Palestine, Ohio

via telephone

Thursday,
February 16, 2023

APPEARANCES:

MARK DOUGHERTY, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

PAUL STANCIL, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

RON LAWLER, Senior Director of Mechanical Services
Trinity Leasing

IRVIN WHITE
Federal Railroad Administration

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I N T E R V I E W

(9:02 a.m.)

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2
3 MR. DOUGHERTY: Good morning. My name is Mark Dougherty.
4 And I am with the National Transportation Safety Board. Today is
5 February 16th, 2023, and the time is 9:02 a.m. Eastern Daylight
6 Time.

7 We are conducting an interview with Fire Chief Keith Drabick
8 of the East Palestine Fire Department. The interview is being
9 conducted via Microsoft Teams meeting. The interview is in
10 connection with an accident that occurred on February 3rd, 2023,
11 where an Eastbound Norfolk Southern Freight Train hauling
12 hazardous materials derailed resulting in a fire and an evacuation
13 of the town of East Palestine, Ohio.

14 The accident occurred on main track one along Norfolk
15 Southern's Keystone Division Fort Wayne Line. The NTSB accident
16 reference number for this accident is RRD23MR023.

17 The purpose of this investigation is to increase safety. Not
18 to assign fault, blame, or liability. NTSB cannot offer any
19 guarantee to confidentiality or immunity from illegal or
20 (indiscernible) actions. A transcript of this summary of the
21 interview will be placed into the public docket.

22 Chief, do you understand that this interview is being
23 recorded?

24 MR. DRABICK: Yes, I do.

25 MR. DOUGHERTY: Before we start the interview and questions,

1 I'd like to go around and introduce ourselves and who all is on
2 the call. If you could, when I call you, please spell out your
3 last name, who you are representing and your work title.

4 Chief, if we could start with you.

5 MR. DRABICK: My name is Keith Drabick. I am the fire chief
6 for the village of East Palestine. K-e-i-t-h D-r-a-b-i-c-k.

7 MR. DOUGHERTY: Paul?

8 MR. STANCIL: I'm Paul Stancil, senior hazardous materials
9 accident investigator with the National Transportation Safety
10 Board. My last name is spelled S-t-a-n-c-i-l.

11 MR. DOUGHERTY: Ron?

12 MR. LAWLER: Ron Lawler, Trinity Leasing, senior director of
13 mechanical services. Last name is L-a-w-l-e-r.

14 MR. DOUGHERTY: And Irvin (ph.)?

15 MR. WHITE: Irvin White, W-h-i-t-e, Federal Railroad
16 Administration (indiscernible) IAC for the East Palestine
17 derailment.

18 MR. DOUGHERTY: I'd like to remind everyone to speak clearly
19 so that we can get an actual recording.

20 INTERVIEW OF KEITH DRABICK

21 BY MR. DOUGHERTY:

22 Q. Again, my name is Mark Dougherty. The spelling of my last
23 name is D-o-u-g-h-e-r-t-y. And I'm with the NTSB Hazardous
24 Materials Accident Investigator for this accident.

25 Chief Drabick, if you have any questions that is unclear or

1 you don't understand a question, please ask the questioner to
2 clarify or we'll restate the question. And if I don't --

3 A. All right.

4 Q. And if you don't know the answer to any questions, it's okay
5 to tell us that you don't know. We don't want to speculate if you
6 don't know the answer to a question. Again, the sole purpose of
7 this investigation is to improve safety. Not to assign fault,
8 blame, or liability. Our sole mission is to improve
9 transportation safety and prevent accidents.

10 And as such, the NTSB cannot offer any guarantee of
11 confidentiality, immunity from any legal proceedings by any other
12 agency whether it's state, local, or federal. A transcript of
13 this interview will be placed in a public docket for the
14 investigation which will be available via the NTSB website.

15 So to start off Chief Drabick -- can I call you Chief?

16 A. Sure.

17 Q. Chief, if you could tell us about your background, education,
18 and expertise.

19 A. Background -- I've been in the fire service since 1986.
20 Primarily in a volunteer capacity until 2009. 2009, I moved to
21 Horry County, South Carolina. Started out as a firefighter
22 paramedic. Worked my way up through the ranks, up to an acting
23 battalion chief for that department.

24 I have a Master's in public administration, a Bachelor's in
25 fire science, and an Associate's in emergency medical technology.

1 I am a hazmat technician with a specialist for chlorine. Several
2 fire classes throughout firefighter II, so on and so forth.

3 Q. And what positions have you held with the fire department?

4 A. I have held from firefighter clear up through all the ranks,
5 lieutenant, captain, chief, assistant chief. And now chief of
6 this department, acting battalion chief.

7 Q. So how long have you been in this current position?

8 A. One year and six days.

9 Q. And so, what do your duties consist of as the fire chief?

10 A. Ensuring safety for the village. Handling the administrative
11 functions of the department. Scheduling, assigning training,
12 developing training, developing SOPs, protocols, standard
13 operating procedures, hiring employees, and managing the overall
14 operations of the department.

15 Q. So who do you currently report to?

16 A. I currently report to the village manager which we have an
17 interim manager at this point that Ms. Tracy Spratt (ph.).

18 Q. And so, if you could start us off and give us a detailed
19 account, to the best of your ability, of the accident from the
20 time that you were notified first call through the vent and burn
21 process that we had -- that was reporting up until today.

22 A. Initially, received the call at approximately just before
23 2100 hours on Friday, the 3rd. I was actually in route to
24 vacation. I was on Interstate 80 -- getting off of Interstate 80,
25 getting onto Interstate 81 in Pennsylvania when I got notified of

1 the incident in question.

2 Immediately, got communication from my line officers on scene
3 advising me what we had which was a large train derailment with a
4 lot of fire and potential exposures into several businesses in
5 town. I turned around at that point and started heading back.
6 Maintained communication with my people on the ground.

7 They had started calling in additional resources trying to
8 find out from Norfolk Southern what exactly was on the train,
9 trying to get the (indiscernible) to get the list of materials for
10 the cars in question. I believe it was around 30 minutes into the
11 incident, a representative from Norfolk Southern did arrive on
12 scene and meet with my deputy chief. I was on the phone with him
13 at the time.

14 We tried to ascertain exactly what was on the train. The
15 initial report to me was that there was vinyl chlorine on the
16 train. I confirmed that with him twice and he reiterated that he
17 had misspoken. That it was vinyl chloride. We got into our ERGs
18 to see what our evacuation distance should be for the conditions
19 we were met with. I confirmed that using the WISER app so that we
20 had a cross-reference of two different resources looking at that
21 chemical in particular.

22 We decided that there needed to be a one-mile evacuation zone
23 as recommended by the Department of Transportation ERG guide. The
24 -- my officer in charge at that point, Deputy Chief Gorby (ph.),
25 was continuing to have resources come in, apply water to the fire

1 trying to protect the exposures and cool it down.

2 They did establish a command post at that point at what they
3 initially perceived that at that mile mark. We were off by a
4 couple blocks and subsequently had to move that as we proceeded
5 through the incident.

6 I arrived on scene right around 2 a.m. Somewhere in that
7 area. I did maintain communication with them throughout by a
8 cellphone with updates and different progress that was going on.
9 When I got back into town, I did come past the scene to kind of
10 get an eyeball of what was going on myself before going up. I did
11 a face-to-face briefing with my officers. Found out what their
12 game plan was. Was still applying water.

13 We then got into a conversation where it was decided that we
14 needed to have unmanned master streams down there. We started
15 that process of setting those back up and pulling people back.
16 That was then changed to where there was some confusion through
17 the Norfolk Folks of whether we needed to do that or not. So I
18 had to stop what we were doing at the command post. Get
19 clarification on that through them.

20 It was decided that they -- we did not -- they did not want
21 those running at that point. So we ceased that operation. Pulled
22 everybody back. Then we started communicating through the command
23 post. There was several drone flights going up trying to identify
24 exactly what cars were involved to find which product was
25 involved.

1 I did get my hands on a printed copy of the consist at that
2 point to look through. Was told that they believed that it was
3 around car 20 or -- somewhere between 20 and 23 up to the low
4 seventies. Somewhere between 70 and 75 that were involved.

5 I was advised that they were going to attempt to uncouple
6 cars, I believe, 73, somewhere in that 70 to 75 range. I believe
7 it was car 73, even 72, uncouple. They were going to bring an
8 engine in from the Canton side to pull those cars that were not
9 involved in necessarily a regular fire. And I was told that they
10 had coordinated with you folks and got approval from you folks to
11 make that happen.

12 Again, we were still going through doing the evacuation zone
13 trying to make sure the citizens knew that we needed to evacuate a
14 one mile. All of the different parties started to enter into the
15 command zone, into the command area, from my arrival until
16 daylight. We started coordinating and working with all those
17 entities to try and determine what was the best action.

18 The drone footage was able -- and I believe was able to
19 determine which cars were as far as the hazardous cars, which ones
20 were burning freely. That was coordinated. We found that there
21 were several of the vinyl chloride cars that were burning along
22 with other some products.

23 I -- the paper copy of the consist that I was looking at was
24 taken by somebody else and I did not have access to that any
25 longer. I did find a representative from Norfolk and insist that

1 they send me another copy by email so that I had that. And they
2 did that in a fairly timely fashion, in my opinion. I can't tell
3 you exactly what that time frame was, but I felt that it was a
4 timely fashion.

5 We started coordinated efforts between them and folks from
6 your agency. I don't remember the gentleman's name who was there
7 first but he was extremely helpful. And then as the rest of you
8 folks got there, became more helpful. And we continued on through
9 that process. We had set up an evacuation area for residents at
10 the high school. The EMA was assisting in all of this operation.
11 EMA was a fantastic resource to have there.

12 I did request an IMT through the EMA to kind of get us
13 organized and start the paperwork process and alleviate some of
14 the tasks that were having to handle or the EMA was having to
15 handle as far as calling in additional resources and having
16 resources standing by without exhausting my local resources.

17 We did get that team. They sent a recon team, for lack of
18 better terms. A group of chiefs from different local counties to
19 come down and assist us in starting the process until the IMT got
20 here. Once the IMT got here, I told them what I needed as far as
21 resources and starting the paperwork to create the incident action
22 plan and all of the appropriate NIMS and ICS forms.

23 They began to do that. We started developing our plan in
24 conjunction with the NTSB and Norfolk Southern, EPA, the
25 Pennsylvania assets that were here, as well. We did decide that

1 because of looking -- getting a better detail of the map that we
2 were just inside of that evacuation zone. So we opted to move the
3 command post outside of that to ensure that we were in safety, as
4 well.

5 We -- by doing that, we had to move our dispatch center to an
6 alternate location. The police chief handled that. We got to
7 that alternate location. During that process, I offered you guys,
8 the NTSB, our station -- at the time what was Station 3 up in
9 Unity Township to give you some -- a little bit more room to
10 yourselves and be able to do what you needed to do without
11 everybody else running around. The command post we were in was
12 very small and not adequate for that. When we moved to the bigger
13 one -- much better operation areas for us. We were able to get
14 things situated much better.

15 But my deputy chief did a great job picking that initial one
16 and trying to do the best that he possibly could. We had started
17 getting notified throughout that that the temperature of the one
18 vinyl chloride car, as they were able to get down there and get
19 temperature readings, that one had started to fluctuate and it was
20 explained to me that the safety system or relief valve on it was
21 not functioning properly. They believe it to be gummed up. And
22 they believed that that product was going through polymerization
23 and that they were definitely concerned about that particular car.

24 They had mentioned at that point -- went over the steps of
25 mitigation for that. And said that they felt we were getting to

1 the point of possibly having to do a vent and burn on that
2 particular one. There was some confusion back and forth about
3 whether it was going to be just one car, two cars, all five cars.
4 And that confusion carried on for some time throughout the
5 incident.

6 We did monitor that temperature -- or not we. I should say
7 they monitored that temperature throughout. And got to the point
8 where they thought it was necessary, based on their findings, that
9 we do that vent and burn. I kind of got blindsided, which
10 probably is the biggest thing that bothers me out of all of this.
11 I was in a meeting with my team at the -- at our command center in
12 the library of the school. Had got pulled out with Governor
13 DeWine to go down to the Norfolk Southern center of the command
14 post. Their room in that school.

15 And as I walked in the room, I was met by the CEO and several
16 other members and one of the members said I had 13 minutes to make
17 a decision of whether or not we were going to vent or burn because
18 they were running out of daylight.

19 I was very overwhelmed by that approach to explaining that to
20 me. Previous to that, they had explained the vent and burn
21 process to me. However, at that point, with being presented with
22 that significant time constraint to make that decision, I asked
23 them to explain that process again. In my opinion, there was some
24 frustration on their part of having to do that.

25 I reiterated to the fact that yes, you had already explained

1 it but this is a very large decision that can affect my community
2 and my men and I needed that explained once again, the whole
3 process. And the reasoning behind it. They did go through that
4 explanation process with me again. Explained it very well. I
5 think they understood why I wanted that.

6 I then stepped out of the room to process that information
7 myself. And I discussed that with several of my chief officers.
8 And went ahead and made the decision to go ahead and allow them to
9 do that based on the information that we had received from them in
10 reverence to the temperature fluctuation going back and forth and
11 the process that that product was going through.

12 At one point, they just said that the temperature got as high
13 as 139 degrees Fahrenheit. They believed that to be based upon,
14 as they were down there moving stuff and getting a better handle
15 on the situation itself and getting temperature readings, they did
16 find a small spot -- what was described to me as a small spot fire
17 underneath of that particular car. They did extinguish that. And
18 they did go back in 30-minute increments from there and get
19 readings. The readings did decrease. However, there was
20 fluctuation.

21 I insisted that every reading that they got on that
22 particular car, that somebody physically walked over and reported
23 that information to us, and that did occur. And they did come
24 back over every time and give us that information. And there was
25 a lot of fluctuation in that temperature.

1 But again, based on the information they gave me, I walked
2 back into the room, discussed with them again the process, and if
3 they truly felt that we were at that point; that that was the only
4 way to safely mitigate that. We agreed that it was so I gave them
5 the go ahead to do that vent and burn.

6 They said that the 13-minute time limit was because they
7 didn't want to do it at night. It needed to be a daylight
8 operation. And there was a significant -- in my opinion, a
9 significant delay. They were supposed to -- I believe that
10 process was supposed to take place at 3:00 and that process didn't
11 take -- that actual vent and burn didn't take place until, I
12 believe, it was sometime between 4:30 and 4:45. I don't have my
13 timeline in front of me to give you the exact time but I'm sure
14 you have the exact time there.

15 That process did take place. I did sit in the IMP's command
16 bus which was located outside of the school. They did have an
17 elevated external camera that was focused on that area. We did
18 watch that vent and burn from inside with the CEO of Norfolk
19 Southern and some other representatives from different agencies.

20 And I was assured by all parties involved that that had went
21 off appropriately and as it should have. And I have no reason to
22 believe that it did not. I had never been witness to or had
23 anything to do with anything of that nature before.

24 Q. Well, thank you for all that. I appreciate that information.

25 A. Yes, sir.

1 Q. I think we'll -- if you don't mind, we're going to do some
2 follow-up questions. I have just a few and then we'll go through
3 and see who else has questions here.

4 So my first -- could you clarify how long after the
5 derailment and first responders arrived on scene to when you
6 received the initial hazardous materials consist from Norfolk
7 Southern?

8 A. Me personally, I got my hands on the consist shortly after I
9 arrived at the command post. So somewhere around 2 a.m., I
10 physically got my hands on it. And that was a copy that I had
11 found lying on the table by where we were sitting giving our -- I
12 was getting my briefing on the incident up to that point. I found
13 one sitting there.

14 Q. So the train derailment happened at what time?

15 A. I believe right around 2100 hours. It may have been a couple
16 minutes before that but approximately 2100.

17 Q. So we're looking at approximately five hours before -- from
18 the time of derailment to the time that you were communicating
19 with the hazardous materials from Norfolk Southern?

20 A. Correct. When I got the paperwork. I believe that that was
21 communicated to my deputy chief. What was on there prior to that,
22 I am not -- I cannot answer as to whether or not he physically saw
23 it prior to that. I know that I saw it at -- when I got to the
24 command post. And --

25 Q. So those first on scene that were doing the initial

1 firefighting, were they aware of the hazardous materials between
2 2100 and 0200?

3 A. Yes, I believe they were. When the representative from
4 Norfolk came and started communicating with my deputy chief,
5 that's when that decision was made that due to what was in the
6 train or potentially what was burning from the train, that they
7 needed to set up that command post away from the scene and
8 initiate that evacuation zone based on what was in the train.

9 Q. And then, if you could clarify a couple of acronyms. Can you
10 tell me what EMA stands for?

11 A. Emergency Management Agency.

12 Q. And then, IMT.

13 A. Incident Management Team.

14 Q. Can you tell me who maintained the temperature of the cars
15 throughout the process?

16 A. That was Norfolk Southern, sir. I believe it was -- those
17 temperatures were obtained by -- and I may be wrong with the
18 acronym here but they're a mitigation company -- SPSI I believe is
19 what they're -- I believe that's who was down there getting those
20 readings.

21 MR. DOUGHERTY: Thank you. And let's go around and -- for
22 questions. Does anyone have any?

23 MR. WHITE: Irvin White.

24 MR. DOUGHERTY: Irvin, go ahead.

25 BY MR. WHITE:

1 Q. Chief, question I had -- I reviewed the NTSB OP notes from
2 the event and the crew indicated that nobody had contacted them as
3 regards to the derailment. And the reason I bring this up is
4 typically most train crews will have a copy of the consist on the
5 head end that I would say is the street terminology. They're
6 willing to give away the paperwork and get the hell out of dodge
7 as quick as possible.

8 But it seems that nobody may have approached the locomotives
9 or the crew to find out what was on board and they actually had a
10 copy of the paperwork. So I was just curious if you had any
11 comments regarding that.

12 A. From my understanding, when that crew -- that crew
13 disconnected the engine and several cars, from my understanding,
14 from the train and moved on further down the line. Whether that
15 engineer was one of the ones that came back up to the scene or it
16 was somebody else from Norfolk Southern, I can't answer to that,
17 sir. I can't answer to whether we had any contact with that
18 engineer at all.

19 Q. And then, from what I remember, the train crew never
20 contacted anybody from the emergency response side. And they
21 actually ended up going to Conway. I don't think any of the crew
22 actually went to the incident command at any point during the
23 situation. And I do not know if there was access to the
24 locomotive from your people on the ground. I really don't know.
25 But like I say, typically, most -- the train crews usually have a

1 copy of the consist onboard with them.

2 A. Correct, correct. And I do not believe that we had any
3 contact with those individuals, sir.

4 MR. WHITE: Yes, sir.

5 MR. DOUGHERTY: Okay, Paul, did you have some questions?

6 BY MR. STANCIL:

7 Q. Yes, I do have a few just to clarify a few issues. Regarding
8 -- let's talk about training and preparedness. Did you or members
9 of your department ever attend any training that was offered by
10 Norfolk Southern or other railroads?

11 A. I have attended some training from railroads prior to coming
12 here. As far as my people attending a railroad-sponsored
13 training, we have not done that in the past year. I cannot answer
14 that. I do know that I sent my deputy chief and one other
15 individual to a tabletop exercise that was conducted in East
16 Liverpool through the Emergency Management Agency in reference to
17 a train derailment. And they had done that several months prior
18 to this incident. Sometime within that year I have been here. I
19 cannot give you an exact date on that. I don't remember right
20 now.

21 So there was a tabletop exercise done that I believe -- I
22 cannot say one way or the other for sure that Norfolk Southern was
23 involved in, but I can't say for sure. And we had just -- several
24 months before, as well -- had put all of our members through a
25 hazmat -- not all of our members. Several of our members through

1 a hazmat awareness and hazmat operations class here in house.

2 Q. So how did you feel about your department's state of
3 readiness to respond to an event like this?

4 A. We definitely could use more training on it 100 percent. I
5 don't -- I feel that you can never have enough training. And
6 especially when we have something of this magnitude running
7 through our village, I think that's definitely something that
8 (audio distortion).

9 The offer has been made through different entities whether it
10 be Norfolk Southern or their contractors, that they would like to
11 get us some additional training. There's been mention of sending
12 a contingency to Pueblo for the rail car class there. Which I was
13 all for. I haven't heard any more about that since then. I'm
14 going to kind of hold them to the fire on that one.

15 And then, a representative from SPSI -- I believe that's
16 their name -- had offered to come up and -- once this is all over
17 and done, do a review with us in reference to the incident. So
18 that -- you know, in case we had any questions, should we have
19 done anything different, could we have done anything better, just
20 from their technical standpoint.

21 Q. That's great. I appreciate that answer. Have you ever
22 handled a hazardous material incident with a train before?

23 A. I have been involved in them. I have never handled one
24 myself, sir.

25 Q. Was this the first incident involving vinyl chloride?

1 A. Yes, sir.

2 Q. You mentioned that you had a specialist in chlorine.

3 A. I had my hazmat through the -- I have my hazmat tech through
4 the state of Pennsylvania and then also through the state of South
5 Carolina. And South Carolina also offered a chlorine specialist
6 program and I took that, as well.

7 Q. Have you ever handled chlorine before?

8 A. Yes, sir. In conjunction with a hazmat team in South
9 Carolina as a member of the response team there.

10 Q. Have there been any other incidents in East Palestine that --
11 prior to this one?

12 A. I have been told but I do not know for certain that there was
13 another train derailment in what I believe was the '70s or '80s --
14 late '70s/early '80s. But I do not believe it involved any
15 hazardous materials per se. I believe it was more of a car haul
16 -- cars being hauled to a dealer -- from the manufacturer to
17 another entity. But I can't -- I don't believe -- from my
18 knowledge, sir, there's been no substantial incident here
19 involving any hazardous materials.

20 Q. You mentioned that you made use of the WISER app to gather
21 some information. Do you all have access to the AskRail app and
22 if so, did you use it on this incident?

23 A. No, sir. We do not have access to that. And to be honest
24 with you, I'm not familiar with that app.

25 Q. It's an app that will give you the consist of a train

1 electronically by entering a rail car number. That's not familiar
2 to you?

3 A. No, sir. It's not. And I would love to -- if somebody could
4 share that information with me so that I can put that in all of my
5 apparatus and my chief officers have access to that.

6 Q. Yes, we can talk about that afterwards here, definitely. In
7 terms of documenting what other mutual aid you receive, is there a
8 CAD report that lays out the chronology of the events in terms of
9 arriving support to this?

10 A. Yeah. So with the amount of support that we pulled in and
11 from the different counties that we pulled in and states, I have
12 my CAD report from my dispatch which would cover only a few units
13 and then the notification to other PSAPs which are 911 centers for
14 their notification. And I can get the -- each individual report
15 from those different 911 centers.

16 Q. Would you be able to provide that to us, sir?

17 A. Yes, sir. I can work on getting that for you.

18 Q. Appreciate that. You talked about the decision to vent and
19 burn. Was the ultimate decision your decision?

20 A. Unfortunately, yes. They made it seem quite clear to me that
21 I had to make that decision.

22 Q. As the incident commander?

23 A. Correct.

24 Q. And they explained to you -- when you said they were giving
25 you information, they meaning the railroad. Correct?

1 A. Correct. The railroad and their contractors.

2 Q. Norfolk Southern and their contractors?

3 A. Correct, sir.

4 Q. Did they -- tell us a little bit more about why -- how they
5 explained why it was necessary to do this.

6 A. They explained that the product was going through
7 polymerization or they believed it was based on the temperature
8 fluctuations and increases and decreases and they had laid out
9 what I believe, if I recall correctly, was five or six options
10 from offloading to -- different stages offloading (indiscernible)
11 getting down to this vent and burn. I don't remember the --
12 exactly what all five or six of those were. But they said that
13 they felt that they were at their last option which was that vent
14 and burn due to the situation that that particular rail car was in
15 and the functionality of the safety devices associated with that
16 rail car.

17 Q. Was the vent and burn option considered the safest option?
18 Is that why it was selected?

19 A. Correct, sir. It was explained to me that at that point,
20 that was the safest option for everybody involved.

21 Q. When you arrived on scene -- well, you were monitoring from
22 2:00 a.m. on -- were the vinyl chloride cars venting through their
23 pressure relief devices at that time or --

24 A. There were several cars identified to me that had the vinyl
25 chloride that were going through that process that were venting

1 out. However, I cannot say one way or the other if at any point
2 the two full cars that they were concerned with, and the one in
3 particular that they kept referencing, had ever vented or were
4 venting throughout that process.

5 Q. Do you know when the venting started?

6 A. That I do not know, sir. I believe when I went down -- when
7 I sent my crews down range to do that unmanned master stream
8 setup, I did have to take some hose down but I wanted to once
9 again get a look at it. And there were cars venting at that
10 point. And from the TV screen and the live stream that they had
11 at the command post, you could see the cars -- several of those
12 cars were venting. I was told one or two of those cars were a
13 vinyl chloride car but I could not tell you one way or another for
14 sure if it was because I could not read the numbers on that car.
15 They were -- that's -- the drone footage was going through the
16 process of helping them identify that.

17 Q. Can you give us a timestamp of when the venting was going on,
18 when it started?

19 A. I cannot give you a timestamp on that right now, sir. No, I
20 cannot.

21 Q. Fair enough. You mentioned the cars were surrounded by a
22 fire or a pool of fire, do you know what was burning in that fire?

23 A. No, sir. I do not. Again, until after the drone was up
24 several times and the -- everybody there was trying to identify
25 based on the drone footage the markings onto a car, on the cars,

1 to identify which cars were which, I could not have told you which
2 ones were burning and what was burning. We were told that there
3 was a vinyl chloride car for sure involved in there. They were
4 confident that those cars were involved in that. But I --
5 personally, I could not tell you one way or the other until they
6 identified those cars and compared them to the consist and the
7 numbers on it, I could not say one way or another if one of them
8 was or was not.

9 Q. To your knowledge, were any of the vinyl chloride cars
10 breached other than through the pressure relief devices?

11 A. Not to my knowledge, sir.

12 Q. You mention an elevated camera recorded the vent and burn.
13 Who has that video?

14 A. I would imagine that the incident management team does. It
15 was their bus we were in. I do not have it. To be honest with
16 you, I don't know if it was recorded or not. I just know we were
17 sitting in the bus watching on the monitors inside of the bus via
18 the elevated camera.

19 Q. So thinking back to what you saw on that video, when the
20 charges were set off, what did you see prior to the flame?

21 A. Prior to the flame, there was -- if I recall correctly, there
22 was white smoke in the area of that that was coming up. Then
23 there was some flame that shot up. And right after the flame
24 immediately shot up, a very thick black plume or cloud went up and
25 pretty much engulfed everything else. I believe it appeared to be

1 all black. Maybe some tinges of gray throughout. Again, I was
2 looking at a monitor through a camera from some distance. And
3 that's pretty much what we saw was the thick black smoke with
4 still some flame at the bottom coming up into the column.

5 Q. Did you observe any solids coming out of the cars?

6 A. No, sir. I can't say that I did.

7 Q. Regarding the evacuation and decision to end the evacuation,
8 what can you tell us about that?

9 A. The decision for the evacuation was based on the product that
10 we were notified of. The vinyl chloride, based on recommendations
11 found in the ERG and through the WISER app of the one-mile
12 evacuation radius for the -- what we believed was burning at the
13 time. And as far as the lifting of the evacuation, that was based
14 on information gathered from the U.S. EPA, the Ohio EPA, CDC,
15 CTEC, everybody involved looked over the air readings. Sorry
16 about that. Looked over the air monitoring readings, the air
17 quality, the -- what was going on in the water.

18 They set those numbers and parameters -- and again, my
19 acronym may be wrong -- but the ATDSR or ATSDR -- to determine in
20 conjunction with the Pennsylvania and Ohio to determine in
21 conjunction what levels were acceptable and if the readings from
22 all of the air monitoring and testing were within those limits and
23 within those acceptable parameters to lift that evacuation order.

24 Q. Were they providing technical advice to you as to when the
25 evacuation order should be lifted?

1 A. Yes, they all agreed that the readings were below those
2 acceptable parameters and that it was safe to lift the evacuation
3 order.

4 Q. And when did that occur?

5 A. That occurred -- I believe that was on Wednesday. I'm not
6 100 -- I would have to go back and look. My days have all run
7 together to be honest with you. And that was in conjunction after
8 a meeting was held at the command post with all the entities
9 involved, making sure that we were all -- it was either Wednesday
10 or Thursday we lifted that. I would have to look back, sir. That
11 all of the readings and levels that they have obtained thus to
12 that point were below those permissible limits.

13 And a phone conference between Governor Shapiro and Governor
14 DeWine was conducted so that we could -- we didn't want to lift
15 the evacuation in one state and not the other. We wanted to do
16 that in conjunction. So once everything was agreed on and the
17 reentry plan was agreed on by both states and all entities
18 involved, based on the recommendation from the subject matter
19 experts and recommendations from those organizations, we lifted
20 the evacuation order.

21 Q. And what can you tell us about any reports of exposures or
22 injuries?

23 A. I am happy to say, sir, that -- and I'm very proud of this
24 fact that with -- in the neighborhood of 300 firemen on the ground
25 working that incident, we had zero reportable injuries. Zero

1 fatalities. I have not heard of any injuries related to it or
2 have been notified. I did personally send two of my people here
3 over the last several days to the ER for evaluation for flu-like
4 symptoms just as a precautionary measure. We did have one fireman
5 earlier on in the incident that we sent for evaluation from -- he
6 was from Darlington Township in Beaver County, Pennsylvania. He
7 was not feeling well during an evaluation period. And we sent him
8 to be evaluated. And it was determined that he had drank too many
9 energy drinks and not enough water.

10 Q. How about the public, general public?

11 A. I have not heard any solid reports of any injuries. There
12 are -- with anything like this, there's rumors floating around
13 town that people have rashes and some stuff like that but I have
14 not been officially notified of any injuries related to this
15 incident.

16 Q. Is the health department or the state EPA or federal EPA --
17 is anyone tracking that?

18 A. I believe that the health department is, sir, but I honestly
19 don't have an answer for you. A solid answer to that. I know
20 that the representative from the county health department was at
21 the command post. He was involved along with the state's health
22 department. Involved in coming to that decision to lift that
23 evacuation order based on those parameters. So I'm not aware for
24 sure if they are tracking that. I believe they are but I'm not
25 aware, sir.

1 Q. Are you aware whether the health department has requested the
2 ATSDR to do an epidemiological survey or --

3 A. I have not. I'm not aware of that, sir.

4 MR. STANCIL: I think that's all I have. I'll pass it on to
5 the next person, Mark. Thank you very much, Chief. I appreciate
6 that.

7 MR. DRABICK: Thank you, Mr. Stancil.

8 MR. DOUGHERTY: Any other questions?

9 MR. LAWLER: Hey, Mark. This is Ron. I've just got one.
10 What was the critical temperature that you were looking for and
11 what was the final temperature that you reported on the car and
12 were all five cars monitored for temp?

13 MR. DRABICK: To the best of my knowledge, they were
14 monitoring all five cars for temp. The critical temperature
15 reported to me by Norfolk Southern and their contract crews was of
16 150 degrees Fahrenheit. They said that they would have to cease
17 all operations down there and pull their people out if it got to
18 that 150-degree Fahrenheit.

19 I had made a decision, in conjunction with the other folks at
20 the command post, that if that temperature got to 146, based on
21 what they were telling us, that we would start that pullback
22 process for our folks just as a safety precaution. But 150 was
23 told to us was their absolute -- for their people down there
24 working and getting readings and stuff -- if it hit that 150, they
25 were pulling their people out.

1 As far as the highest reading I was told, I believe the
2 highest reading we were told was 141.

3 MR. LAWLER: Thank you, sir.

4 MR. DRABICK: Yes, sir. Thank you.

5 MR. DOUGHERTY: Last round of any follow-up questions from
6 anyone.

7 MR. STANCIL: I do have one, Mark.

8 BY MR. STANCIL:

9 Q. Chief, what was your understanding of the likely outcome
10 should the vent and burn not be performed?

11 A. A catastrophic failure of the tank (indiscernible).

12 Q. What consequences would that have had?

13 A. That -- they provided me with basically a PowerPoint going
14 over what the catastrophic effects of that happening would be at
15 their estimation. I have that -- I believe I have given that to
16 you folks already. The tank failure, the explosion going out into
17 that one-mile evacuation zone.

18 I believe the furthest that -- according to their PowerPoint
19 that they gave us and their calculations, that we could've had
20 shrapnel damage and injury as far out as, I believe, it was 48 or
21 4900 feet from the -- that car in particular. I would have to
22 look back on that PowerPoint to get those exact figures for you,
23 sir. Which I believe I gave that to you on -- when you got there.

24 Q. Yes, we do have that one. That's all I have. Thank you,
25 sir.

1 A. Yes, sir.

2 MR. DOUGHERTY: And this is Mark Dougherty just with another
3 follow-up question. Regarding the five tanks that were in the --
4 that had the process of the vent and burn, was there a concern
5 over all five of the cars or was it the single car that had the
6 highest temperature and the rest were done at as a precautionary?
7 Can you.

8 MR. DRABICK: So the way it was explained to me is the one
9 car for sure that the safety devices were not functioning on and
10 potentially the second car that they believe still was at full
11 capacity were the biggest concerns. And that the other cars were
12 included in that vent and burn process as a safety precaution.

13 It was explained to me that they can't -- how those cars
14 were, that they couldn't single out one car and safely vent and
15 burn it without the possibility of something happening to the
16 other cars. And again, that one car, two car, three car, five
17 car, there was a lot of discrepancy in my opinion about what they
18 were going to do as far as the vent and burn in that process.

19 Different people had said different things. We're only going
20 to do one. We're going to do two. We're going to do five. And I
21 don't feel that I comfortably had an answer to that 100 percent
22 until we discussed that final discussion of the vent and burn
23 process.

24 MR. DOUGHERTY: Thank you, Chief.

25 MR. DRABICK: Yes, sir.

1 MR. DOUGHERTY: Any other questions?

2 MR. WHITE: Mark, I've got one more. Keith, was Oxy involved
3 in providing that critical temperature?

4 MR. DRABICK: Was who involved, sir?

5 MR. WHITE: Oxy, the owner of the product.

6 MR. DRABICK: No, not to my knowledge, sir. Up until now I
7 didn't know who the owner of that product was, sir.

8 MR. WHITE: Thank you.

9 MR. DRABICK: Yes, sir.

10 MR. DOUGHERTY: Anyone else? Well, Chief Drabick, I
11 appreciate your time. We have asked you a lot of questions today.
12 Is there anything that we haven't asked you that we should have
13 knowledge of or that would be important to our investigation that
14 you think is important for us to know?

15 MR. DRABICK: Not that I can think of right now, sir. I hope
16 that I was able to help you and help the process of getting this
17 situated and getting the investigation done and making
18 transportation of this product through my town safer.

19 MR. DOUGHERTY: Absolutely.

20 MR. DRABICK: And on that note, if there's any training that
21 you folks have that you'd be willing to share with us or provide
22 to us, we would be more than acceptable of getting that training,
23 as well.

24 MR. DOUGHERTY: Absolutely will do. Thank you for that. So
25 if you do think of anything in the meantime, obviously, please

1 feel free to get in touch with us.

2 MR. DRABICK: Yes, sir.

3 MR. DOUGHERTY: Again, I thank you for your time and I
4 appreciate the information. And we will terminate the interview
5 now. The time is 9:55 a.m. And thank you very much.

6 MR. DRABICK: Thank you.

7 (Whereupon, at 9:55 a.m., 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: NORFOLK SOUTHERN TRAIN DERAILMENT
 IN EAST PALESTINE, OHIO
 ON FEBRUARY 3, 2023
 Interview of Keith Drabick

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD23MR005

PLACE: via telephone

DATE: February 16, 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.



Katie Leach
Transcriber