



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

| | |
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| GROUP | G |
| EXHIBIT | |
| 26 | |

Agency / Organization

NTSB

Title

**Interview Transcript – Norfolk Southern Dispatcher -
March 8, 2023**



I, Linda Hickey, have read the foregoing pages of a copy of my interview that was held on March 8, 2023. These pages constitute a true and accurate transcription of same with the exception of the following amendments, additions, deletions or corrections:

PAGE NO: LINE NO: CHANGE AND REASON FOR CHANGE

- 5 1 remove NS
- 5 14 replace “thank you” with “yes”
- 5 24 should be “CP 488” not “EP 48”
- 6 2 should be “megadesks” and delete “and et cetera”
- 6 3 should be “runs” not “was”
- 6 4 should be “ends at” not “ended”
- 6 5 should be “CP UD” (needs a space)
- 6 14 should be “32N” (no space) should be “DP” not “CP” should read “...the usual 32N – heavy with DP - “
- 6 15 ”running” not “Running” (no cap); should be “547 empty for Shire Oaks” replace “around anywhere” with “following.”
- 6 16 delete entire line (clarity)
- 6 17 should be “32N” (no space)
- 6 18 delete “in the operating line.”
- 6 19 should be “the 547”, delete “When”
- 6 20 should be “32N” (no space), should be “both got east” not “got to the other side”
- 6 21 should be “CP Alliance – the 547 runs through Conway” delete “gets”
- 6 22 delete “reloaded and”, replace (indiscernible) with “called against it.”
- 7 1 should be “train – a 4-something, I can’t remember what that one”
- 7 2 should be “was – that was third in line.”
- 7 4 delete everything after Cleveland
- 7 5 delete “west”, (indiscernible) is “at Maple Heights.”
- 7 8 should be “32N” (no space)
- 7 9 should be “Crew” not “It”
- 7 11 should be “32N” not “32”, “CP Lum” not “Lum”, “CP Enon” not “Seenon”
- 7 12 ”CP Murph” not “Murphs”
- 7 13 ”32N” (no space)
- 7 14 should be “going to be even slower than they already were.”
- 7 16 ”32N” (no space), should be “When 32N and 547 were east of CP Lum, I heard the detector call” (delete comma)

- 7__17__ "32N" (no space)_____
- 7__18__ should be "catch enough of it, I had..."
- 7__20__ "32N" (no space)
- 7__24__ should be "it was an airhose"
- 7__25__ delete "hose"
- 8__1__ (indiscernible) is "has to go find the problem."
- 8__4__ "32N" (no space), "be a long" not "be long", "thing," not "thing."
- 8__5__ "so" not "So"
- 8__6__ "32N" (no space), should be "emergency," not "emergency."
- 8__7__ should be "was," not "was."
- 8__8__ (indiscernible) is "I was"
- 8__14__ replace "John Gray" with "Jon Grey"
- 8__15__ replace "yelled 32 N" with "exclaimed 32N" and should be "I said "Wait – what??"
- 8__19__ should be "547 crew gave their rough guess of"
- 8__21__ (indiscernible) should be "DP engine"
- 8__22__ delete "They threw some handbrakes on it."
- 8__23__ should be "the 547, so" and (indiscernible) is "shove."
- 8__24__ replace "that" with "back to the"
- 9__10__ delete "et cetera,"
- 9__12__ should be "hot wheels, indicated by axle number." delete rest of line
- 9__20__ (indiscernible) is "in case they're needed"
- 10__24__ should be "But I did not"
- 12__12__ (indiscernible) is "need the dispatcher to."__

I declare that I have read my statements and that it is true and correct subject to any changes in the form or substance entered here.

Date: __5-02-2023_____ Witness: _Linda Hickey_____

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: LINDA HICKEY, Train Dispatcher
Norfolk Southern

via telephone

Wednesday,
March 8, 2023

APPEARANCES:

ZACH ZAGATA, Operations Group Chairman
National Transportation Safety Board

JOSEPH CLAY, Operating Practices Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration

ERVIN WHITE, Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration

SHAWN LAWTON, Safety Investigator
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen

JEFF MITCHELL, Safety Team Investigator
SMART Transportation

DAVID GOODEN, Division Superintendent
Norfolk Southern

I N D E X

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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. ZAGATA: Good morning, my name is Zach Zagata and I am
3 the NTSB operations group chairman for this accident. We are
4 conducting an interview on March 8, 2023, with Linda Hickey who
5 works for NS. This interview is in conjunction with NTSB's
6 investigation of the accident near East Palestine, Ohio. The NTSB
7 accident reference no. is RRD23MR005.

8 The purpose of this investigation is to increase safety. Not
9 to assign fault, blame, or liability. Before we begin our
10 interview and questions, we'll go around and introduce ourselves.
11 Please spell your last name and your title. I'll start off.
12 Again, my name is Zach Zagata, Z-a-g-a-t-a. And I am the NTSB
13 operations group chairman.

14 FRA?

15 MR. CLAY: Joseph Clay. District 2 operating practices
16 inspector.

17 MR. WHITE: Ervin White, W-h-i-t-e. FRA (indiscernible)
18 inspector. Also (indiscernible).

19 MR. ZAGATA: Thank you. BLET.

20 MR. LAWTON: BLET. Shawn Lawton, S-h-a-w-n L-a-w-t-o-n.
21 BLET safety (indiscernible) investigator.

22 MR. ZAGATA: Thank you. SMART?

23 MR. MITCHELL: Jeff Mitchell. SMART Transportation safety
24 team investigator.

25 MR. ZAGATA: Thank you. Linda?

1 MS. HICKEY: Linda Hickey. NS Norfolk Southern train
2 dispatcher.

3 MR. ZAGATA: Thank you. Is anybody else on here that I
4 missed?

5 MR. GOODEN: Yeah, David Gooden is on. David Gooden, G-o-o-
6 d-e-n. Norfolk Southern division superintendent (indiscernible)
7 division.

8 MR. ZAGATA: Thank you. Do we have your permission to record
9 our discussion with you today, Linda?

10 MS. HICKEY: Yes.

11 MR. ZAGATA: Do you understand the transcript is going to be
12 part of the public docket, and as such, we cannot guarantee any
13 confidentiality?

14 MS. HICKEY: Thank you.

15 INTERVIEW OF LINDA HICKEY

16 BY MR. ZAGATA:

17 Q. To start off, if you could give us an overview of your
18 railroad career.

19 A. Well, I started working for Norfolk Southern back in 2007.
20 Qualified on my first desk in 2008. That was Toledo East which
21 was the territory between Toledo and Cleveland. My second desk,
22 if I recall correctly -- it's been a minute -- was Cleveland
23 proper, which was from Berea out to what we call Ravenna. And
24 then down towards Buffalo which ended at EP 48 (ph.).

25 My third desk was Toledo West, which was the territory

1 between Toledo and Elkhart. Those desks have since been cut up
2 into (indiscernible) and et cetera. So my desk now consists of
3 Cleveland East which was from Sandusky, Ohio, to Conway, down
4 towards Buffalo. And my reach towards Buffalo ended what we call
5 CPUD (ph.). So I picked up a few more miles on that desk in the
6 last couple years.

7 I've been a train dispatcher the entire duration. That's
8 where I started. And that's about all I can tell you.

9 Q. I appreciate that, Linda. Now, if you could give us an
10 overview of your day from when you went on duty and kind of any
11 conversations with the 32 N throughout your shift. And then if
12 you could of kind talk us through how you became aware of the
13 accident, any conversations you had, or any actions you took.

14 A. Okay. Well, the 32 N was the usual 32 N. Heavy with CP.
15 Running east with a 547 (indiscernible) train around anywhere
16 because I had westbound traffic in the way.

17 I did not have any unusual conversations with the 32 N crew.
18 Nothing untoward going on with their train in the operating line.
19 When I did finally have an opportunity to get the (indiscernible)
20 train out from behind the 32 N when they got to the other side of
21 CP Alliance, the 547 runs through the (indiscernible) and gets
22 reloaded and they had a crew (indiscernible). So at that point, I
23 had nothing coming west. The westbound van fleet was not in
24 Conway yet, Conway proper. They were still coming around the
25 corner to start swapping crews so I had a window. There was also

1 another train, 4 something that I can't remember that that one
2 was, that was third in line.

3 The eastbound van fleet, if I recall correctly, was just
4 coming into Cleveland so they like at Berea and points farther
5 west. Actually, the first one might have been (indiscernible). I
6 have not seen a playback. I have not listened to the tapes. So I
7 can only give you my best recollection.

8 So 32 N coming east. Like I said, nothing unusual going on
9 with the train. It was reporting no issues. Detectors aren't
10 saying unusual. Just the usual run. 547, I swung them out from
11 behind the 32 at Lum (ph.) to get them around at Seenon (ph.). I
12 didn't want to do it at Murphs (ph.) because there's a hill there.
13 And the 32 N was going to be climbing some hills so they were
14 going to be slower, even slower than they were at (indiscernible).

15 So the 547 was scheduled to come around them and everybody
16 knew that. 32 N, as they were going, I heard the detector call,
17 critical alarm. I confirm with the 32 N crew that it was them
18 because I couldn't catch enough it. I had a lot of static. I
19 couldn't catch enough of it to find out which rail, which train.

20 So I asked the 32 N. It was my assumption it was them. And
21 they said yes, it was them. So they were stopping their train to
22 investigate the critical alarm like they're supposed to when the
23 train went in emergency.

24 We assumed it was -- we pretty much all assumed it was air
25 hose got a kink, something like that. Nothing unusual. So the

1 conductor, of course (indiscernible). So he gets on the ground to
2 go inspect. 547 is coming around. I had the third train stop
3 west of Lum just in case -- I didn't know what was going on with
4 32 N. didn't know if it was going to be long drawn-out thing.

5 So I could time out their signals and change their route if
6 need be. 547, I told them that the 32 N was in emergency. Told
7 them where the head end was. Told them the length of the train.
8 (Indiscernible) seeing if maybe they can assist the conductor in
9 the 32 N.

10 32 N came around the -- pardon me. 547 came around the
11 corner. There's a curve out there. Reported that they could go
12 no further because the track was blocked. At that point, I
13 confirmed that yes, 32 N is derailed.

14 My assistant chief on the Keystone, John Gray, came running
15 up to me and yelled 32 N is on fire. I said wait, what.
16 Apparently, one of the cars had derailed into a building and was
17 on fire. So that's when I found out 32 N was derailed and on
18 fire. Conductor for the 32 N was walking towards the rear and
19 reported smoke. 547, I found out from them their rough guess of
20 where the derailment began which is -- I believe it was about 30
21 cars ahead of the (indiscernible).

22 They threw some hand brakes on it. I had nothing behind
23 them. So I could protect them on a blind (indiscernible). They
24 threw some hand brakes on the rear of the 32N and shoved that
25 clear. The 32N crew, upon instructions that I received from my

1 chief at the time, threw some hand brakes on the head end of the
2 train, cutaway, and moved clear about a half a mile or so.

3 Crews were all fine but that's when all -- everybody started
4 mobilizing to the site of 32N. That's pretty much it.

5 Q. I appreciate it. Can you talk us through as far as
6 notifications on hotbox detectors. As far as your
7 responsibilities of what you normally do when you're aware of it
8 or any communication you have with that.

9 A. If the hotbox detectors do not call a critical alarm, they
10 just call an alarm and start calling out hot wheels, et cetera, we
11 have the train stopped as soon as practical and find out what's
12 going on with the hot -- the indicating (indiscernible).

13 For critical alarms, they are supposed to stop as soon as
14 they can which is what the 32N was doing. To find out why the
15 detector just had a major issue with their train. So I am
16 supposed to instruct the crew to stop ASAP if they're not already
17 doing that which usually, they are. And then, everybody in the
18 vicinity gets told that these guys are inspecting for a critical
19 hotbox, come by slow, see if you can assist. Mechanical forces
20 are usually called out (indiscernible).

21 Q. I appreciate it. What about as far as conversations with
22 emergency responders? Did you talk to anybody as far as emergency
23 responders?

24 A. I did not. As soon as we heard fire, my chief was already on
25 the phone making those phone calls.

1 MR. ZAGATA: I appreciate it. That's all I've got for now.
2 I'll go around to each group. FRA, you got an additional
3 questions?

4 MR. CLAY: Yeah, this is Joseph Clay. First, I want to thank
5 you for remaining calm on the radio and getting the opposing
6 traffic stopped in a timely manner. Listen to the
7 (indiscernible).

8 MR. ZAGATA: JD, you're breaking up there.

9 MS. HICKEY: Okay. I thought it was just me.

10 MR. ZAGATA: We'll move onto Ervin and see if JD gets better
11 service there. Ervin, you want to go ahead? I see you had your
12 hand up for a minute.

13 BY MR. WHITE:

14 Q. Good morning, yes. I was just curious, on this situation,
15 did you have any communication with the ATC (indiscernible) desk
16 operator regarding anything was going on with his train?

17 A. I did not have any interaction with anybody except the train
18 crews. The people behind me, the chiefs, et cetera, handled all
19 the emergency responders.

20 Q. So if you have a situation -- I mean, have you ever had the
21 ATC or (indiscernible) at all even say we have --

22 A. No.

23 Q. -- a trending situation, you need to stop the train?

24 A. Oh, those -- yes, I have. But I -- he -- did not have any
25 conversation with him about this particular train that night.

1 Yes, I have heard from the -- what we call the wayside desk. Yes.

2 Q. How do they usually communicate with you when you do?

3 A. They actually --

4 Q. Is it telephone or email or --

5 A. They will send out an email and they will try to contact the
6 crew and tell them they've got a trending hot. If they're unable
7 to, they call us on the phone.

8 Q. So as far as the email, so you're copied in on the emails or
9 you're sent --

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. -- directly an email?

12 A. I am copied in on the emails with a few other people but it
13 does come to me. Yes.

14 Q. And then if they have something really critical, they're
15 going to call you directly on the phone?

16 A. If they cannot --

17 MR. CLAY: Okay, can you hear me now?

18 MS. HICKEY: Yes.

19 MR. ZAGATA: Is that all you got, Ervin?

20 MR. WHITE: Yes, sir.

21 MR. ZAGATA: Appreciate it. JD, did you get better service
22 there?

23 BY MR. CLAY:

24 Q. Yeah. I got the tail end of what Mr. White said. My -- what
25 my question was is the communication between the dispatcher and

1 the wayside people, I understand when the critical alarm -- you
2 know that with the radio. If there is some trending hot, how is
3 the dispatcher and the wayside people -- how do they communicate
4 or how did you communicate?

5 A. On that particular case, there was no trending hot on that
6 train. So normally, if they've got -- if wayside is showing a
7 trending hot, they will contact the crew directly after they send
8 out -- they send out an email to everybody. They will also try to
9 contact the crew directly on the radio.

10 If for some reason, they cannot do that, they will throw up
11 the email saying that they couldn't contact the crew and they
12 (indiscernible). I usually try to stay on top of the emails for
13 that. If no action is taken and they're seeing nothing -- excuse
14 me -- that nothing is happening, they will call me and say hey,
15 they've got a trending hot. They need to stop and inspect --

16 Q. Okay, thank you.

17 A. -- and usually they can contact the crews. It's unusual for
18 them to not be able to reach the crews.

19 MR. ZAGATA: Is that all you got, JD?

20 MR. CLAY: Thank you. Yes.

21 MR. ZAGATA: Thanks. So this is Zach Zagata, NTSB. Just to
22 be clear, Linda. The only time that they would contact you is if
23 they can't get ahold of the crew. That's when wayside would
24 contact you. Is that correct?

25 MS. HICKEY: Generally, yes, yes.

1 MR. ZAGATA: Thank you. BLET, any questions?

2 MR. LAWTON: Zach, I sent you a text message. I don't know
3 if it's easier because of having background noise or not. My
4 question was is there -- is a plan or a NS rule of temperature
5 increases between detectors. If that was covered, I apologize for
6 that.

7 But I didn't know if there was an increase between detectors,
8 if that set off an alarm and/or if there's a plan in place for
9 that to be handled or how that was. With the increase in between
10 the two detectors, to us, it was concerning. But nobody found out
11 about anything until obviously the East Palestine detector went
12 off. And by that time, it was too late.

13 MS. HICKEY: Is that question directed at me?

14 MR. ZAGATA: Yes, Linda. If you could answer it.

15 MS. HICKEY: When they're trending hot between detectors, the
16 wayside desk will contact the crew and send out the email and
17 escalate it if they cannot contact the crew. I don't know per se
18 if it's a rule but that is pretty much the operating procedure.

19 MR. LAWTON: Thank you.

20 MR. ZAGATA: SMART, any questions?

21 MR. MITCHELL: Yeah, good morning. Jeff Mitchell, SMART
22 Transportation. I just had a comment. Just want to say you did
23 -- sounded like a very good job of letting the other crews know
24 what was going on and top stop their train and stuff. I'm glad
25 you were there to actually hear it firsthand. I know you can't

1 sit in your chair the entire time you're there. You do have to
2 use the restroom and go to coffee or whatever. But like I said,
3 it's a very fortunate thing that you were there and you did do an
4 exceptional job.

5 MS. HICKEY: Thank you. I'm glad I was there, too.

6 MR. ZAGATA: Thank you. NS?

7 MR. GOODEN: No, Zach. No questions from Norfolk Southern.
8 I just would like to say, Linda, I think you did an awesome job.
9 Very cool, calm, and collected, and you handled the situation very
10 well. So thank you for doing that.

11 MS. HICKEY: Thank you.

12 MR. ZAGATA: Thanks, Dave. Is there anybody else that has
13 any additional questions? Linda, is there anything you'd like to
14 add?

15 MS. HICKEY: No. I think I'm good. I think I've covered
16 everything.

17 MR. ZAGATA: Appreciate it. If we have additional questions,
18 is it okay to contact you?

19 MS. HICKEY: Yeah, go ahead.

20 MR. ZAGATA: Awesome. Appreciate it. Well, once again, we
21 appreciate your help in this and with that, we'll conclude the
22 interview.

23 MS. HICKEY: Thank you.

24 MR. ZAGATA: Thanks. Have a good day.

25 (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: NORFOLK SOUTHERN TRAIN DERAILMENT
 IN EAST PALESTINE, OHIO
 ON FEBRUARY 3, 2023
 Interview of Linda Hickey

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD23MR005

PLACE: via telephone

DATE: March 8, 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.

A black rectangular redaction box covers the signature of the transcriber.

Katie Leach
Transcriber