



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

<b>GROUP</b>	G
<b>EXHIBIT</b>	
28	

Agency / Organization

**NTSB**

Title

**Interview Transcript – NS Conductor  
February 5, 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

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: KEVIN STAUFFER, Conductor  
Norfolk Southern

Sunday,  
February 5, 2023

APPEARANCES:

ZACH ZAGATA, Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

BRUCE TATGENHORST, Chairman  
Division 255  
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen

DAVE GOODEN, Division Superintendent  
Keystone Division  
Norfolk Southern Railroad

KRAIG BARNER, General Manager, Northern Region  
Norfolk Southern Railroad

JOSEPH CLAY, Operating Practice Inspector  
Federal Railroad Administration District 2

JEFF MITCHELL, National Safety Director  
SMART Transportation

SHAWN LAWTON, Investigator  
Safety Task Force  
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen

DEWAYNE DEHART, General Chairman  
Safety Task Force  
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen

JORDIE GIBSON, observer  
Federal Railroad Administration

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I N T E R V I E W

1  
2 MR. ZAGATA: Good afternoon, my name is Zach Zagata and I am  
3 the NTSB ops group chairman for this accident and we're conducting  
4 an interview on February 5th, 2023 with Kevin Stauffer, who works  
5 for NS. This interview is in conjunction with NTSB's  
6 investigation of the accident in East Palestine. The NTSB  
7 accident reference number is RRD23MR005. The purpose of this  
8 investigation is to increase safety and not to assign fault,  
9 blame, or liability.

10 Before we begin our interview and questions, let's go around  
11 and introduce ourselves, please spell your last name and your  
12 title. I'll start off and then pass to my right. Again, my name  
13 is Zach Zagata, Z-a-g-a-t-a, and I'm the NTSB operations group  
14 chairman.

15 MR. STAUFFER: My name is Kevin Stauffer, S-t-a-u-f-f-e-r.  
16 I'm a conductor for NS.

17 MR. TATGENHORST: Bruce Tatgenhorst, T-a-t-g-e-n-h-o-r-s-t.  
18 I'm the BLET local chairman, Division 255.

19 MR. GOODEN: David Gooden, G-o-o-d-e-n, Division  
20 Superintendent, Norfolk Southern for the Keystone Division.

21 MR. BARNER: Kraig Barner, B-a-r-n-e-r, General Manager,  
22 Northern Region, Norfolk Southern.

23 MR. CLAY: Joseph Clay, C-l-a-y, FRA operating practices.

24 MR. MITCHELL: I'm Jeff Mitchell, SMART Transportation,  
25 national safety team investigator.

1 MR. LAWTON: Shawn Lawton, L-a-w-t-o-n, BLET safety task  
2 force investigator.

3 MR. DEHART: Dewayne Dehart, D-e-h-a-r-t, General Chairman,  
4 BLET and BLET Task Force observer.

5 MR. GIBSON: Jordan Gibson, G-i-b-s-o-n, FRA observer.

6 MR. ZAGATA: Thank you.

7 Do we have your permission to record our discussion with you  
8 today?

9 MR. STAUFFER: Yeah.

10 MR. ZAGATA: Thank you. Do you understand that part of the  
11 transcript is part of the public docket and as such, we cannot  
12 guarantee any confidentiality?

13 MR. STAUFFER: Yeah.

14 MR. ZAGATA: Thank you.

15 INTERVIEW OF KEVIN STAUFFER

16 BY MR. ZAGATA:

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

19 A. I went down to McDonough in April last year, marked up first  
20 week of July. And that's how long, yeah, about what, 8 months on  
21 the railroad, something like that.

22 Q. Eight months, okay. Is that including your training time or  
23 total?

24 A. I'll have a year in April including my training time, so  
25 yeah, maybe 8 months total.

1 Q. Okay. What job do you work right now?

2 A. I'm on the extra board up at Connolly, PA.

3 Q. Okay. Have you worked with this engineer before?

4 A. Yes, this is our second or third time working together.

5 Q. Okay, all right, sounds good. Now, if you could just give us  
6 an overview of your day starting out from when you went on duty  
7 and then talking to the point of derailment, you know, where you  
8 were at in the cab --

9 A. Right.

10 Q. -- what was going on, and then afterwards.

11 A. Okay. We went on duty at 1:15 that afternoon. I got  
12 everything, I got our bulletins, and I got up on the train, check  
13 our -- check the wheeler, check brake slips and everything, we  
14 were good to go. It was a good trip, heading out. We had a CT  
15 with us, he sat in the front seat, I sat in the seat behind him,  
16 he was calling the signals, you know, as we were going down. I'm  
17 still keep an eye out on what's going on, you know, and keep him  
18 in front to make sure, you know, everything was going fine.  
19 Everything was fine until, up until the -- until the accident.

20 Q. Okay. As you were approaching the accident, can you talk a  
21 little bit about as far as detectors and that kind of stuff?

22 A. Every detector we went across, we had no defects. So when we  
23 came up to the 48.9 detector, we got a critical alarm, I believe  
24 it was 101 south rail, we came to a stop and by that time, by the  
25 time we came to a stop, dispatch, we called emergency on the

1 radio, called dispatch, told them we were in an emergency. We  
2 toned up wayside, they told us same thing, 101 south rail, and I  
3 even told them, I said okay, we didn't have any defects until then  
4 and I was getting ready to walk the train and then the dispatcher  
5 came on and told us that we -- they had a 9-1-1 call already in  
6 place, say we're on the ground and building's on fire.

7 So I proceeded to -- we went through a HAZMAT book, went  
8 through to see where we -- you know, what they gave us, what car,  
9 you know, what number, we checked to see where it was, went  
10 through our book, inhalation hazard, you know, that -- I can't  
11 remember, was that vinyl chloride? So we tied down two brakes,  
12 cut away and then proceed to look through the book and we needed  
13 to be a mile away, so we proceeded further and waited on further  
14 instructions.

15 Q. So you went back and you tied two handbrakes on cars?

16 A. That is correct.

17 Q. Okay. And then you closed the angle cock on the locomotive?

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. You pulled the pin?

20 A. Pulled the pin, got out of there.

21 Q. Good. After that, did you go back up to the head end or what  
22 did you do?

23 A. Yes, yeah. Once I cut away, I went to the head end.

24 Q. Okay. Did you feel like, as far as the emergency response,  
25 pretty quick or --



1 A. Yes.

2 MR. ZAGATA: Okay. That's all I've got for now, I'll pass it  
3 off to Dave.

4 BY MR. GOODEN:

5 Q. Dave Gooden, Norfolk Southern. Prior to the derailment, any  
6 -- you said you had no critical alarms, you're talking --

7 A. We had no defects all the way, through all of our detectors  
8 until we hit the 48.9 detector.

9 Q. Okay. Did anyone from the wayside from Norfolk Southern  
10 notify your train --

11 A. No.

12 Q. -- prior to the derailment?

13 A. No, none.

14 Q. So no indications of any issues?

15 A. No.

16 MR. GOODEN: Okay, all right, no further questions.

17 BY MR. BARNER:

18 Q. Kraig Barner with Norfolk Southern. You said emergency  
19 response was quick?

20 A. I believe so, because by the time I could see, there was  
21 already flashing red lights back there, like when I got off the  
22 train and seen it.

23 Q. How about anyone checking on you guys, your wellbeing when --

24 A. Dispatcher asked if we were okay.

25 MR. BARNER: Okay. That's all I have.

1 BY MR. CLAY:

2 Q. Joseph Clay, FRA. During your trip, any time approaching the  
3 derailment site, did you all -- did you happen to ever look out  
4 your window to see if there's a curve, possible to see a window,  
5 could you see --

6 A. Like kind of like a track to see --

7 Q. Yeah --

8 (Crosstalk)

9 MR. STAUFFER: I'm always looking forward to see what's going  
10 on, I did not see any, you know, defects in the rail.

11 BY MR. CLAY:

12 Q. You didn't recognize anything --

13 A. No, nothing. Nothing out of the ordinary, no.

14 Q. Nothing felt, felt anything --

15 A. No.

16 Q. -- wrong with the train, no jerking around --

17 A. Uh-uh.

18 Q. -- or anything like that? Okay. Did the engineer say  
19 anything about the train acting funny?

20 A. No, we honestly didn't know we came apart.

21 Q. Do you know if it was having any air issues?

22 A. No, no air issues.

23 MR. CLAY: That's all I have.

24 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

25 Q. You said you've been marked up for 8 months?

1 A. I'm marked up first week of July, so --

2 Q. First week of July, okay.

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. You all went over your HAZMAT. When did you decide or when  
5 was it decided that you should come back to the train?

6 A. Well, when we told -- when we toned wayside, they told us,  
7 they gave us a car number. We looked through our wheeler to see  
8 where at, you know, the hot wheel was and we seen that one and we  
9 opened up our book to see what the procedure was, you know, how to  
10 handle that car. And the book says 300 feet for a spill, a mile  
11 if it's on fire. So that's what we did.

12 Q. And you got permission to cut away?

13 A. Did I get permission to cut away?

14 Q. Yes.

15 A. No, we cut away. I seen the fire and we cut away.

16 Q. Okay, so you were -- you didn't wait around, you --

17 A. No. When we seen the flames in the back, I cut away and got  
18 us out of there, didn't know what was going to happen.

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No further questions

20 BY MR. LAWTON:

21 Q. Shawn Lawton. You said you guys got out and went back and  
22 made a cut. Do you remember how many cars you cut and took down  
23 with you when you made a cut on the cars?

24 A. I didn't make no cut on the cars. I cut away from the last,  
25 the last of the train and we just went light power.

1 Q. Oh, you were light power, okay.

2 A. I did not take any -- I did not take any cars with us.

3 Q. Oh, okay. Okay, so you tied two brakes down and took the  
4 power light?

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. Okay. When you said you looked up the HAZMAT, was it  
7 electronic, was it your books, EOM books?

8 A. I went through our -- the orange HAZMAT book.

9 Q. A physical book?

10 A. Yeah, physical book, yeah.

11 MR. LAWTON: Okay, all right. I think that's all I got for  
12 now.

13 BY MR. ZAGATA:

14 Q. Zach Zagata, NTSB. From when you got the notification from  
15 the detector, how long would you say it was, ballpark, from when  
16 you guys went in emergency?

17 A. Seconds.

18 Q. Seconds, okay. And then when you went back to tie those  
19 handbrakes, how far away from the flames do you think you were?

20 A. We're talking, I mean, we're talking 50, maybe 50 cars, maybe  
21 more than that, from the flames.

22 Q. They had already kicked up pretty good?

23 A. Oh, yeah. By the time I got off the train, it was already --  
24 by the time I was behind, got to the rear of the train, I couldn't  
25 see the flames, I was on the other side. I seen the smoke rolling

1 and I climbed over the locomotive and I seen it and I was like  
2 yeah, we got to -- we got to get out of here.

3 Q. Do you feel like your training you received was --

4 A. When it comes to the HAZMAT part, yes. Yes.

5 Q. And the other parts of it?

6 A. Yeah, I believe so, right, right. There's instinct when you  
7 see a fire, you know, a big fire back there, I was like yeah, we  
8 need to get out of here.

9 MR. ZAGATA: Good. Go around one more time, any additional  
10 questions?

11 MR. GOODEN: Dave Gooden, no further questions.

12 MR. BARNER: Kraig Barner, no further questions, but I do  
13 want to tell you, very nice job --

14 MR. STAUFFER: Thank you.

15 MR. BARNER: -- taking care of yourself and your crew and  
16 getting out of there --

17 MR. STAUFFER: Thank you.

18 MR. BARNER: -- using the ERG (ph.) to guide you, it's a nice  
19 job.

20 MR. CLAY: Joseph Clay, FRA. Same thing he said, as well.

21 MR. STAUFFER: Thank you.

22 MR. MITCHELL: Jeff Mitchell, just like to say I'm glad there  
23 was a conductor on the train that was able to cut away, you  
24 could've sat there, could've been bad, so good job of taking --  
25 pulling yourself to cut away and getting out of there.

1 MR. STAUFFER: Thank you.

2 MR. LAWTON: Shawn Lawton, I'll echo. And I've got to be  
3 honest, I've been on the railroad a long time and I am awful at  
4 HAZMAT, for you guys to find out your distances as quick as you  
5 did and then you found out that you were to be a mile away, that's  
6 a compliment to you, to the NS, to you guys, I mean, you'd smoke  
7 me as a railroader without question, so it's very impressive.

8 MR. STAUFFER: Thank you.

9 BY MR. ZAGATA:

10 Q. Zach Zagata, NTSB. Absolutely outstanding job. So do you  
11 have anything that you can think of that can be done going  
12 forward, maybe?

13 A. Not at this time, no.

14 Q. Good, all right. Last question, if we have anything  
15 additional, is it okay to contact you?

16 A. Sure.

17 MR. ZAGATA: I appreciate it. Well, with that, we'll  
18 conclude our interview.

19 MR. STAUFFER: All right.

20 MR. ZAGATA: Thank you.

21 (Whereupon, the interview concluded.)  
22  
23  
24  
25

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 Kevin Stauffer

ACCIDENT NO.:               RRD23MR005

DATE:                         February 5, 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.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Karen D. Martini  
Transcriber