



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	
8	

Agency / Organization

NTSB

Title

**Interview Transcript – Jason Poe
President, Explosives Services
International, March 31, 2023**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

NORFOLK SOUTHERN TRAIN DERAILMENT *

IN EAST PALESTINE, OHIO *

ON FEBRUARY 3, 2023 *

Accident No.: RRD23MR005

* * * * *

Interview of: WILLIAM JASON POE, President
Explosive Services International

via Microsoft Teams

Friday,
March 31, 2023

APPEARANCES:

MARC DOUGHERTY, Hazardous Material Group
Investigator and Group Chair
National Transportation Safety Board

PAUL STANCIL, Senior Hazard Materials Accident
Investigation
National Transportation Safety Board

RUBEN PAYAN, Investigator-in-Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

TERRY HEIDKAMP, Vice President and Party Coordinator
GATZ Corporation

RANDY KELTZ, Manager of Tank Car Safety Programs
Federal Railroad Administration

KEITH DRABICK, Fire Chief
Village of East Palestine, Ohio

ROBERT WOOD, System Manager of Hazardous Materials
Norfolk Southern Railway

Karenanne Stegmann, Party Coordinator, Vice President
of Supply Chain
Oxy Vinyls LP

RON LAWLER, Senior Director of Mechanical Services
Trinity Leasing

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Explosive Services International

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I N T E R V I E W

(1:01 p.m. ET)

1
2
3 MR. DOUGHERTY: Good afternoon. My name is Marc Dougherty,
4 and I'm with then National Transportation Safety Board. Today is
5 March 31st, 2023, and the current time is 1:01 p.m. Eastern Time.

6 We're conducting an investigation with Mr. Jason Poe of
7 Explosive Services International. This interview is being
8 conducted via Microsoft Teams.

9 The interview is in connection with an accident that occurred
10 on February 3rd, 2023, where an eastbound Norfolk Southern freight
11 train hauling hazardous materials derailed resulting in fire and
12 evacuation of the Town of East Palestine, Ohio. The accident
13 occurred on main track 1 along Norfolk Southern's Keystone
14 Division, Fort Wayne Mine. The NTSB accident reference number for
15 this accident is RRD23MR023 [sic].

16 The purpose of this investigation is to increase safety, not
17 to assign fault, blame or liability. NTSB cannot offer any
18 guarantee to confidentiality or immunity from legal or certificate
19 actions.

20 A transcript or summary of this interview will be placed into
21 the public docket.

22 The interviewee can have one representative of the
23 interviewee's choice.

24 Mr. Poe, do you understand that the interview is being
25 recorded?

1 MR. POE: Yes, sir, I do.

2 MR. DOUGHERTY: Okay. So before we start the interview and
3 questions, let's go around the room and introduce ourselves. If
4 you could, please spell your last name, who you're representing
5 and your work title. I'd like to remind everybody to speak
6 clearly so we can get the actual record. I will start with myself
7 and go around the table.

8 Again, my name is Marc Dougherty. The spelling of my last
9 name is D-o-u-g-h-e-r-t-y. And I'm the NTSB hazardous materials
10 group investigator and also the group chair for this incident.

11 Mr. Stancil.

12 MR. STANCIL: I'm Paul Stancil, senior hazardous materials
13 accident investigator, National Transportation Safety Board. And,
14 my name is spelled S-t-a-n-c-i-l.

15 MR. DOUGHERTY: Mr. Hiedkamp.

16 MR. HEIDKAMP: I'm Terry Hiedkamp, vice president, GATX
17 Corporation. I'm party coordinator for GATX. My last name is
18 spelled H-e-i-d-k-a-m-p.

19 MR. DOUGHERTY: Mr. Keltz.

20 MR. KELTZ: Yes. Good afternoon. My name is Randy Keltz.
21 I'm the manager of tank car safety programs with the Federal
22 Railroad Administration. Last name, Keltz, K-e-l-t-z.

23 MR. DOUGHERTY: Chief Drabick.

24 MR. DRABICK: Good afternoon, everybody. Keith Drabick, fire
25 chief for the Village of East Palestine, Ohio. Last name is D-r-

1 a-b-i-c-k.

2 MR. DOUGHERTY: Okay. Mr. Wood.

3 MR. WOOD: Robert Wood. I am system manager of hazardous
4 materials for Norfolk Southern Railway.

5 MR. DOUGHERTY: Ms. Stegmann.

6 MS. STEGMANN: Karenanne Stegmann. Spelling of my last name
7 is S-t-e-g-m-a-n-n. I'm party coordinator for Oxy Vinyls LP, and
8 I'm the vice president of supply chain. Thank you.

9 MR. DOUGHERTY: Mr. Payan.

10 MR. PAYAN: Ruben Payan, last name P-a-y-a-n. I'm with NTSB,
11 investigator-in-charge.

12 MR. DOUGHERTY: And, Mr. Lawler.

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

15 MR. DOUGHERTY: And finally, Mr. Poe.

16 MR. POE: William Jason Poe, and I'm the president of
17 Explosive Services International. The spelling of my last name is
18 P-o-e.

19 MR. DOUGHERTY: Great.

20 MR. POE: I also have my attorney.

21 MR. CHARLTON: My name is David Charlton, last name spelled
22 Charlton, and our law firm is legal counsel to William T. Poe and
23 Associates, Inc. which does business under the name, Explosive
24 Services International.

25 MR. DOUGHERTY: Okay. Thank you. Anyone else that I missed?

1 (No response.)

2 MR. DOUGHERTY: Okay. Mr. Poe, if there's any question
3 that's unclear or you don't understand the question, please ask
4 the question to be clarified or restate the question. And if you
5 don't know the answer to any questions, it's okay to tell us that
6 you don't know. We don't want you to speculate if you don't know
7 the answer.

8 The sole purpose of this investigation again is to improve
9 safety, not to assign fault, blame or liability. Our sole mission
10 is to improve transportation safety and prevent accidents.

11 INTERVIEW OF WILLIAM JASON POE

12 BY MR. DOUGHERTY:

13 Q. So, Mr. Poe, first thanks again for joining us today and
14 taking the time to help with our investigation. If you could
15 start off and just tell us a little bit about your background,
16 your education expertise and as well as your company history.

17 A. Sure. My name's again Jason Poe. I'm the current president
18 of Explosive Services International. Second generation. My
19 father started the company back in 1987. We do kind of unique
20 things with explosives. We work a lot in the oil and gas
21 industry, in Louisiana, in the Gulf of Mexico. We also provide
22 steel cutting services utilizing explosives, and we have done
23 company-wise vent and burns for I guess since 1982 when my father
24 did the Livingston train derailment and started developing the
25 charges that we use today and then kind of modified them over the

1 years to what we use now for a vent and burn rail car charge.

2 With me, I retired from the Louisiana State Police in 2010.
3 I retired as a bomb tech, and I also did hazardous materials
4 response and remediation work and predominantly overseeing that
5 for Louisiana State Police throughout the state of Louisiana as
6 Louisiana is charged with the statutory and regulatory enforcement
7 of explosives and hazardous materials throughout our state.

8 So my background in explosives, I grew up in the business
9 working for my father, William T. Poe and then went on to become a
10 state trooper. I was also a special agent for the Federal Bureau
11 of Investigation for several years before returning to the state
12 police to finish my career out as a trooper in the bomb tech and
13 hazardous materials technician for the state police. In 2010, on
14 my retirement, I went to work for my father and have been doing,
15 you know, full time with Explosive Services International since
16 2010. And my father retired several years ago, and I took over
17 the business and have managed the business since then.

18 Q. All right. Great. So just to give some background, there's
19 a process called vent and burn that was conducted on the five
20 vinyl chloride monomer cars involved in the derailment with a
21 subsequent pool fire. And, the vent and burn, as we understand
22 it, is a means to relieve the pressure that was building inside
23 the tank cars and to prevent the catastrophic failure of the tank
24 cars. Is that a fair statement?

25 A. Yes, sir.

1 Q. Okay. So if you could, given that, walk us through your
2 involvement in the East Palestine vent and burn starting off
3 regarding the initial discussions with Norfolk Southern, the
4 incident command and other parties involved in the decision to
5 vent and burn these cars.

6 A. Sure. The best to my recollection, I received a call on
7 Saturday, I believe it was February 4th, sometime in the
8 afternoon, later afternoon, probably 4, 5 o'clock, from Chip Day
9 with SRS Company. And at that point, he advised me -- asked me if
10 I had heard about the derailment in East Palestine, and I actually
11 happened to be at my hunting camp in North Louisiana, and I hadn't
12 watched the news and hadn't heard anything about it. So he kind
13 of gave me a rundown of what happened and said several vinyl
14 chloride cars had been involved in a derailment, and at that time,
15 they were looking at other options to possibly transfer the
16 product. The fire department wanted to put me on standby just in
17 case our services for vent and burn were needed. And so that kind
18 of started my involvement I would say into the derailment itself.

19 Sometime I guess the next morning, which would have been
20 Sunday, the 5th, I checked in with Chip and just, you know, looked
21 for an update. I knew they were busy, and I was trying to get an
22 update on where we were and if they thought they would need our
23 services or not. That was probably midday from what I can recall.
24 And he said they hadn't determined anything at that point. They
25 were -- it was leaning towards possibly needing a vent and burn

1 but they were still trying to explore other options. And I guess
2 a point of reference at this time is, you know, I'm never the
3 first call. I'm always the absolute last call when ever other
4 option has been exhausted. I'll get a call and say, hey, can you
5 respond to a derailment? So it's always, whether it's Norfolk
6 Southern or any other railroad we do work for, it's always --
7 we're always the last the people that are involved in the, you
8 know, response so to speak.

9 So, at that point, I left North Louisiana and went back to my
10 home in Baton Rouge. And sometime that afternoon, probably around
11 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon, from what I can remember, I got
12 another call from Chip Day with SRS saying, okay, this thing has
13 continued to get worse. There's no way for us to transfer the
14 product. The safety release valves, the pressure release valves
15 are damaged on the cars. They had -- several of them had flame
16 impingement. There was a full fire from what I understood in tow.
17 Quite a few of the cars. He didn't really get into specifics on
18 how many were damaged, but he said we need to get you up here as
19 quick as you can, and it looks like we're going to probably do a
20 vent and burn. From what we could see, there is no other options
21 to transfer this produce safely. We're sitting -- a couple of the
22 cars are very badly damaged. They've had fire on them. The
23 pressure's built, and we're going to probably need your services.

24 And at that point, sometime that afternoon, later than that,
25 we were able to respond and got to Pittsburgh sometime around 11

1 or 12 o'clock from what I remember. And --

2 Q. PM?

3 A. PM, yeah. And so it would still be I guess early hours of
4 Monday morning, but late Sunday night. I don't remember exact
5 time, but it was sometime around midnight. And I was met by Drew
6 McCarty of SPSI who was also a contractor for the railroad, and he
7 kind of gave me a brief, you know, like there was five VCM cars
8 that were badly damaged. They were sitting on basically a bloody
9 (ph.) situation, what he explained, and there wasn't any other way
10 that they could determine to safely transfer the product without
11 putting personnel at risk.

12 And so that night we -- you know, he brought us back to the
13 command post, and we generally talked for a short period of time
14 and then we stowed our gear. And the SPSI and the railroad made
15 reservations for us at a hotel, and we were given that address,
16 went back to the hotel and were told to be back, you know, at the
17 site the next morning where the meetings would start and we would,
18 you know, kind of further the decision to do a vent and burn.

19 So that was kind of what we did, and we went to the hotel,
20 back out the scene, slept for a couple hours, got back to the
21 command post at the SPSI trailer. We had some more discussions
22 with SRS and met with some of the Norfolk Southern guys and some
23 of their response guys. We also met some of the guys from SPSI.
24 We did kind of a brief site walkthrough, not real close to cars,
25 kind of generally just to get an idea of what the site looked

1 like. And then sometime I guess midmorning, we went to the -- I
2 guess it was a middle school from what I can recall where they
3 had, you know, a command post set up, and at that point, you know,
4 we had some more meetings with Norfolk Southern, SRS and SPSI
5 about, you know, where we were as far as the derailment goes, and
6 as far as the cars being damaged and, you know, some of them
7 continued to have flame impingement on them, and they were badly
8 damaged. And that's kind of where we started the discussions of
9 formalizing the plan for a vent and burn.

10 Q. Okay. Thanks for that. Can you clarify the term flame
11 impingement?

12 A. I can tell you my definition is, it's -- and I'm not sure
13 this is the correction definition in terms of what the railroad
14 refers to it as, but my understanding is that there were several
15 other cars that were on fire. I believe they were something like
16 plastic pellets or, you know, some insulation to other cars that
17 was burning around the site. And several of the vinyl chloride
18 cars had actually flames from the other cars putting direct heat
19 on the vinyl chloride cars. There was like a small full fire down
20 in the bottom, you know, kind of the lowest point of the site, and
21 then there was some other cars adjacent to the vinyl chloride cars
22 as well as some of the actual vinyl chloride cars, I guess the
23 insulation was on fire. So when I refer to fire impingement, it
24 was, you know, flames from other cars as well as flames from the
25 vinyl chloride cars putting direct, you know, flame on the actual

1 cars that were involved in the derailment.

2 Q. Okay. Thank you. And then can you walk us through the
3 process of how a vent and burn works and how it's set up and what
4 the intended end result essentially would be for something like
5 that?

6 A. Sure. The vent and burn process is basically a tool that the
7 railroads have used over the years when the product or the
8 railcars themselves are too damaged for traditional transfer
9 means, you know, the cars were involved in a catastrophic event.
10 A lot of the valving and instruments that would be used to
11 transfer them on the railcars were too damaged to actually either
12 transfer them or flare them off. The vent and burn procedure is
13 brought in because it's the safest procedure to protect the
14 personnel that actually have to deal with the derailment. And,
15 the philosophy was developed I guess by my father back in the
16 '80s, when Livingston, the first train derailment using the vent
17 and burn, was the Livingston train that happened to be in my state
18 of Louisiana. I believe it was in 1982.

19 And, the process has essentially remained the same over the
20 years. It's a tool to alleviate the pressure that has built up in
21 the car that can't be transferred either by traditional transfer
22 methods or for something such as a flare. And the concept is to
23 penetrate the car in the vapor space first to alleviate the
24 pressure at the highest point, or try, you know, try to shoot it
25 in the highest point of the car. And then several seconds later,

1 make another shot in the liquid space of the railcar, usually at
2 the very bottom or close to the very bottom to release the liquid
3 portion of the product out into a pit that's usually prepared by
4 the railroad's contractor to contain the liquid. And the
5 philosophy behind it is it's -- you alleviate the pressure and
6 then contain the liquid in the bottom of the pit, and it's
7 initiated by either the fire that's already burning on the
8 surrounding cars or flares that are used -- they're remotely lit
9 to get an ignition source to burn the product and to basically
10 drain the product from the railcars that couldn't be done in any
11 other transfer method.

12 Q. All right. Great. Thank you. Were you able to take any
13 temperature readings from those cars prior to the vent and burn?

14 A. No, sir, I was not. And that's something that we don't
15 actually get involved in. We rely on the railroad and the
16 railroad's contractors to give us the indication that this --
17 these cars are vent and burn based on, you know, what they've seen
18 from the time of the derailment when they got there until current,
19 when we will be arriving. And like I said, usually it's a
20 progression that goes, when they get there, they assess the
21 situation and obviously the vent and burn process is the last
22 thing that they do. They'll make, you know, numerous attempts to
23 compare other ideas of what could possibly be done to alleviate,
24 remediate the situation. So they're building, you know, basically
25 a record of when they get there until when I get there of a

1 decision, you know, to do a vent and burn.

2 Q. Okay. So does --

3 A. Temperatures is one of those things that they document but I
4 do not have any records of that.

5 Q. Okay. So does Explosive Service International, do they have
6 any role in the decision making to vent and burn?

7 A. We have a role to do what I would consider what's morally and
8 legally right to do. We're not going to just go in and do a vent
9 and burn because we want to, you know, clean the site up. So what
10 we do is we base our decision off what the railroad and the
11 railroad's contractors have provided to us. But, as far as the
12 final decision, that's usually done through the railroad, through
13 the incident command structure, and then we're granted permission
14 to do it based on the actual last, you know, resort of being able
15 to remediate the site.

16 Q. Okay. And then I have one last question, and then we'll open
17 it up and go around. Do you know if there was any indication that
18 any of the vinyl chloride cars were empty during the vent and burn
19 process? Like that they were already emptied prior to the vent
20 and burn.

21 A. To my knowledge, I don't believe anyone mentioned that to me,
22 and I guess if they would have, we would have looked at not doing
23 the vent and burn on it, you know, because it would serve no
24 purpose. So to my knowledge, I don't believe anybody ever
25 mentioned to me that any car was empty. I remember the cars all

1 being full or, you know, we wouldn't have actually shot them.

2 Q. Is there --

3 A. When I say full, I mean -- the volume of the product I'm not
4 sure. I know several of the cars were damaged and probably had
5 lost product, but I don't know exactly what -- how much amount was
6 in each car. It's something the railroad and their contractors
7 were, you know, privy to, not me or my guys.

8 Q. Okay. Is there any indication as the vent and burns occurs
9 in the initial charges that go off from the smoke to indicate
10 whether the tank cars were venting just pressure as opposed to
11 pressure and the burn off of the liquid?

12 A. Let me answer that this way. I know we made the original
13 shots. There's always, you know, like a delay from the time we
14 actually make the shot and explosives go off until they seek an
15 ignition source. So you have, you know, for lack of better
16 knowledge, you have boom and then as soon as they find that
17 ignition source, you have fire that goes off in both top shot and
18 bottom shot.

19 Q. I see.

20 A. And from what I can remember and recall and from being there
21 at the site, once we made the top shot, you know, it's always a
22 brief period of time, just a second or two. It seems like longer
23 than that, but I remember it was a very brief period of time, less
24 than a second or two, where we had, you know, the period of time
25 before the shot went off and it actually sought that -- and found

1 the ignition source both from the top shot and the bottom shot.

2 Q. Okay. Great. Thank you.

3 MR. DOUGHERTY: So I'd like to open it up for some questions,
4 some follow-up questions. So for anyone who has a question, if
5 you could please state your name prior to asking a question for
6 the transcript please. Mr. Stancil.

7 MR. STANCIL: Yes, thank you, Marc. I appreciate it.

8 BY MR. STANCIL:

9 Q. And thank you, Mr. Poe, for giving us your time this
10 afternoon.

11 A. Yes, sir.

12 Q. I just have a few follow-up questions for you. First of all,
13 how many people were in your crew helping you with this operation?

14 A. I had myself and four guys.

15 Q. Okay. And were you working directly for SPSI or SRS or were
16 you working for Norfolk Southern?

17 A. I was working for Norfolk Southern.

18 Q. Okay. So, you said you relied on the decision making from
19 the railroad and its contractors. Did they share any information
20 with you about the condition of the cars prior to your vent and
21 burn operation?

22 A. Yes, sir. You know, prior to my arrival, you know, I
23 probably had contact with Chip Day with SRS. And, you know,
24 during my conversations with him, you know, he had mentioned that
25 several cars, that the pressures had continued to build at, you

1 know, fire around the cars. It felt like they were building
2 pressure. They felt like that the pressure relief valves were
3 damaged, and they weren't venting as they were designed to do.
4 And then, you know, once I got to the scene, there was some more
5 discussions about that, both from Norfolk Southern, Dave, and I'm
6 going to butcher his last name, I can't -- I guess you can
7 probably guess. It's Schoendorfer or -- with Norfolk Southern.
8 He was my primary contact there, and then Drew McCarty with SPSI.
9 Lots of discussions with, you know, damage to the cars and not
10 safe enough to transfer them, you know, using present personnel
11 there to transfer the product because of the damage that the cars
12 had sustained and, you know, basically, you know, continuing to
13 further say we believe this is going to be a candidate for vent
14 and burn because we have not come up with any other way to be able
15 to safely transfer this product.

16 And, you know, and we're waiting -- the only other option at
17 that time I heard one of the guys say which is wait for it to blow
18 up, and we obviously can't control that time when that's going to
19 happen or if people there are present when that happens. But,
20 lengthy discussions off and on throughout the day and, you know,
21 right up until we got ready to put our charges on the cars, that
22 there was no other option other than the vent and burn at least
23 based on their years of experience and their expertise knowledge
24 of, you know, derailments and transferring product and so on and
25 so forth.

1 Q. Okay. And thank you for that. Did -- as part of your
2 procedure, do you do any tank car damage assessment yourself?

3 A. Like I said earlier, we did a site visit and it was -- I had
4 members of Norfolk Southern as well as their contractors, SPSI and
5 SRS, and we looked at the cars themselves. We assessed, you know,
6 the damage that they sustained, and we saw the fire that was
7 around the cars. You know, I saw the damaged valving and just the
8 mangle situation that the cars were in. So as far as the damage
9 assessment, that's probably as close to, you know, a damage
10 assessment from what I'm, you know, capable of doing. You know,
11 I'm not a transfer expert. I rely heavily on the railroad and its
12 contractors that are involved in the transferring of product on,
13 you know, not on a daily basis, but in an emergency situation, to
14 give me the knowledge to make my decision that it is a candidate
15 for a vent and burn.

16 Q. Okay. And when you were doing your walkthrough, did you make
17 any note whether pressure release devices were working?

18 A. No, sir, I did not. We didn't get up to the valving and, you
19 know, just -- we're trying to stay -- from a safety perspective,
20 trying to stay away from the cars as much as we could because it
21 was still on fire, and the cars were still burning. There were
22 cars adjacent to the cars that were the candidates for that burn.
23 It was still burning. So we tried to limit our time in the EMD
24 where we call it, a time on target situation. We try to minimize
25 the time that we're in a dangerous situation to go in and gather

1 what we need and look at, you know. Basically what I was looking
2 at was where we would put the charges, you know. Did we have good
3 areas to attach our charges to. We did not specifically look at
4 any the -- I mean I could see that there was stuff damaged, but as
5 far as looking at pressure and all that, I know the contractors
6 there had representatives that were -- from what I remember on
7 cars that they could take pressure readings on, they were checking
8 pressure readings on them. And I'm sure there's a record of that
9 somewhere. I don't have a copy of even that, nor did I take any
10 of that information.

11 Q. All right. So you don't have any recollection what the
12 pressures or the temperatures were in the cars?

13 A. No, sir, I do not.

14 Q. Okay. When the vent and burn was conducted, did you have any
15 personnel in a position to see what initially came out of the car?

16 A. Well, all my personnel were directly next to me and, you
17 know, we were with the team. We had accountability on the crew.
18 We had representatives from the railroad, a representative from
19 SRS, Chip Day, and then Drew McCarty for SPSI. They had
20 accountability for their personnel. And so we were all in the
21 same spot from where we shot the car. So my personnel we all with
22 me, directly, you know, actually seeing probably the same thing
23 that the contractors saw as well.

24 Q. Okay. So what were you able to see? Five shots. Did
25 something come out of each car?

1 A. Yes, sir. It looked from what -- where we could see, we were
2 trying to tuck in behind a building but, you know, we had a
3 positive use of explosives on the top cars. I couldn't see -- you
4 know, there's a rule of thumb with explosives that we all follow.
5 If you can see it, it can see you. So we were kind of tucked in
6 behind a building. I actually couldn't see my charges themselves.
7 I could see up above the charge -- of the cars, and I don't know.
8 I can't tell exactly how many feet above the cars but, you know,
9 we saw a physical, you know, display of vapors that were coming
10 out of the car as I said earlier.

11 When I was talking to Marc, just a second or two where we
12 had, you know, vapor coming out of the top of the car until it
13 found an ignition source which was either a flare or the actual
14 fire from the other cars around it that it, you know, caught
15 fire. And then, you know, mainly beyond that, we had the bottom
16 charges going off and the same kind of situation where as soon as
17 it, you know, was able to find that ignition source, whether it
18 was a flare that we had down in the pit or, you know, fire from
19 the other cars that were set on fire, it found that ignition
20 source and then, you know, you had fire from the top and fire from
21 the bottom in the full fire itself.

22 Q. So before the vapor found an ignition source, were you able
23 to make any observations what it looked like?

24 A. I mean everything was the same as it was when we put, you
25 know, the cars -- we put the charges on the cars and we backed

1 off. I think the situation kind of stayed the same until we
2 actually made shots, and like I said, once we made the shots, it
3 was, you know, the shots went up. You had a small release of
4 pressure, you know. You could hear the pressure come out of the
5 car. It was pretty intense from what I remember, and then it
6 found its ignition source, and then, you know, we did the same
7 thing, shot it and it found its ignition source. On the bottom, I
8 really couldn't see anything because it was down below the
9 buildings that we were looking out, but we did see fire
10 immediately after the shots went off.

11 Q. Okay. But did you see the vapor before it caught fire?

12 A. On the bottom shot or the top shot?

13 Q. Either.

14 A. Yeah, like I said earlier, I did -- I thought I said it
15 twice, but I did see vapor coming out of the top for just a brief
16 period of time before it found its ignition source.

17 Q. No solid materials, just vapor?

18 A. Yes, sir, no solid materials.

19 Q. Okay. Was there any discussion regarding the potential or
20 concern about polymerization occurring in the tank?

21 A. I do remember several people -- I remember Chip Day and Drew
22 McCarty talking about that with David from Norfolk Southern. And
23 that was a concern that they had that, you know, that's one of the
24 issues, polymerization in the cars. I don't remember exactly
25 which cars. I don't remember it being all the cars. I do

1 remember them saying that was a concern in several of the cars.

2 Q. Okay. Have you ever shot cars in the past that contained a
3 monomer where there was a concern about polymerization?

4 A. I believe I have, yes, sir.

5 Q. Can you remember which incidents those were?

6 A. I don't recall. Like I said, specifically to get into the
7 detail, that's just not something that we have been trained to do
8 or nor do we do. So that's something I rely heavily on the
9 railroad and its contractors that are, you know, their
10 specialists. I am explosive contractor. So that's something that
11 we rely on, you know, heavily on them to do.

12 Q. Okay. So who gave the go ahead to proceed with the vent and
13 burn?

14 A. It was a decision that was made in the instant command
15 structure. I believe the fire chief was the incident commander.
16 The railroad had members. So I'm not sure exactly who in the
17 railroad was part of the incident -- I know David was part of the
18 incident command structure, and then the contractors as well. I
19 think it was a collective decision that not just one made. I
20 think it was a collective decision that everybody kind of put
21 their heads together and said, okay, we've exhausted every other
22 option that we think we could come up with, with the -- they
23 probably had several hundred years of experience there between the
24 contractors, the railroad, the fire chief and his personnel. And
25 I think it was a collective decision that was made by many people.

1 To tell you exactly who, I don't know but it was a group of people
2 making a decision that felt like to resolve this situation and the
3 safety of the, you know, fire people out there and all the
4 contractors, that the safest way to resolve the incident was to do
5 a vent and burn, and it was something to say that we, you know, we
6 only act after we're, you know, the incident command structure
7 gives us the authority to, you know, to move forward.

8 Q. Okay. And was there any written plan or safety procedure for
9 doing these or is this -- how do you -- you know, do you have a
10 plan that you follow or is there a requirement to have a written
11 plan before you do a vent and burn?

12 A. Well, we kind of over the years have gotten down to where,
13 you know, we've got a procedure internally within my company that
14 we use, and it's pretty much the same procedure every time. We
15 have a preparation list which we have mostly mentally that we know
16 what we need to do. We kind of -- a lot of it's onsite, working
17 with the railroad and the railroad's contractors, kind of which
18 direction we're going to, you know, move to, to shot. So we
19 actually start from kind of furthers away to where I'm going to
20 wind up and work back towards the shot area where we make a shot.
21 We kind of -- and there's not really a method to -- we put all the
22 top shots on and then we put all the bottom shots on. It's kind
23 of a -- we address each car because each car has certain hazards
24 that, you know, a lot of these cars were twisted and damaged to
25 the point where we had to use ladders to get on top of them. So,

1 we worked -- it's a two man team to put a charge on and then move
2 to, you know, maybe the second car or even -- I think one of the
3 times we actually you know, went out of kind of order because the
4 cars were so damaged that we had to move ladders around and, you
5 know, we had the fire department's personnel, some of the
6 contractors, holding ladders to where, you know, we could actually
7 get up on the cars. It's kind of as you go procedure and there
8 was fire, you know, around the bottom of several of the cars. So
9 we had to kind of readjust what we originally did. So we kind of
10 worked methodically through the process, and we changed up, you
11 know, the plan as we go. So it's kind of a -- it's a working, you
12 know, evolving process that we work through.

13 Q. So do you have any standard procedure or is this just
14 something that you've developed and over the years and turned it
15 into an art or how does that work?

16 MR. CHARLTON: I think he might be asking do you have like a
17 written procedure.

18 MR. POE: No. Yes, we kind of developed it over the years.
19 We have a checklist that, you know, we use for, you know, what
20 we're going to bring derailment wise and how we do what we do.
21 It's basically kind of evolved over the years to -- I'm trying to
22 say it's a -- there's so many variables in a derailment that it's
23 hard to write a procedure for, you know, placing all the top
24 charges and then placing all the bottom charges or do in this
25 order. So it's kind of an on the go as -- we treat each

1 derailment separate. So to say I have a procedure of exactly what
2 we do, no, sir, we do not.

3 Q. Okay. Understood. Did you have any concern about the timing
4 when it occurred during that day?

5 A. As far as timing -- can you give me a little bit more of --

6 Q. Like during the late afternoon. I understand it occurred
7 sometime after 4:40 or about 4:40 in the afternoon. Did that
8 present any concern for you?

9 A. Not really. I mean my concerns were, you know, once there's
10 a -- the incident command system has decided that they're going
11 to, you know, vent and burn, you know, it's something that we try
12 to do, you know, as soon as we can because every, you know, like
13 you're setting several cars from -- it was my understanding that
14 several of the cars had built pressure significant enough to be
15 the topic of discussion for everybody. So, you know, me and my
16 guys going down there, putting charges on there, obviously it's a
17 time sensitive deal. We like to get in and get our charges, you
18 know, placed and then out of there as quick as we can because it
19 makes it safer for us. If you have a catastrophic failure of a
20 car, you don't want to obviously anywhere near it. So I mean I
21 don't remember any concerns other than when they turned it over to
22 me and said, okay, we're ready for a burn, it was sometime, you
23 know, mid afternoon and we went straight into the, you know, the
24 charge preparation part of it. And I didn't really -- I was kind
25 of had the incident command structure being kept informed because

1 I had two of the railroad contractors with me to approach the
2 entire time. So I don't have any specifics of anything regarding
3 time. I know we worked, you know, as quickly and safely as we
4 could trying to get the charges on there.

5 Q. Okay. And my last question, was there any concern about the
6 weather that day?

7 A. To my knowledge, I don't remember anyone saying anything
8 about weather. And again, I really wouldn't probably have any
9 direct knowledge of that anyway because it's something that
10 doesn't, you know, it's not something that involves the explosive
11 portion of the project other than something that maybe the
12 railroad and the other contractors I was working with would have
13 had something to -- maybe more specific to do with weather.

14 Q. Okay, sir. Thank you, Mr. Poe. I appreciate that.

15 A. Yes, sir.

16 MR. STANCIL: I'll pass it on to the next person. Thank you.

17 MR. DOUGHERTY: Anyone else have questions? Just raise your
18 hand in the Teams room here, and we'll call on you. Mr. Keltz.

19 MR. KELTZ: Yeah.

20 BY MR. KELTZ:

21 Q. Good afternoon, Mr. Poe. Randy Keltz, FRA. Just one quick
22 follow-up question. When you shot the, when you shot the five
23 cars, did the initial, did the initial shots all go off as planned
24 or did you have to, did you have to follow up with a secondary
25 type of shot scenario?

1 A. No, sir. Now, they all went as planned.

2 Q. Okay. So this was as picture perfect as it gets, correct?

3 A. Yes, sir. As far as the shots and the penetration we got,
4 it's as good as we could have ever expected it to happen.

5 Q. I guess this leads to another question that jogged my thought
6 here, if you don't mind. So is the jacket -- does the jacket have
7 to be removed or was the jacket removed from these cars to
8 facilitate the shots or can the shot be made through the jacket
9 and tank shell combination?

10 A. Yes, the jackets were not moved, and we do not remove the
11 jackets on a car. I've heard people talk about this in the past,
12 and kind of our philosophy behind not doing it is that we -- or
13 the charge that we developed over the years, will penetrate
14 through the jacket itself and into the actual car. And it's one
15 of the things that we actually talk customers -- there's some
16 information out there that's been put out about removing the
17 jacket on a car. It's something that we don't do because it's
18 just a -- it's something that I would say would be one more step,
19 and it's an unnecessary step when you're trying to remove
20 something for not reason. So our charges are developed and have
21 been developed over the years to shoot through the lining and the
22 car itself, the skin and the car.

23 Q. Very good. Thank you much, sir. And, thank you for your
24 service and help with mitigating this -- with this derailment.

25 A. Yes.

1 MR. KLETZ: That's all I have, Marc.

2 MR. DOUGHERTY: Okay. Any other questions for Mr. Poe? Mr.
3 Stancil.

4 MR. STANCIL: Yes.

5 BY MR. STANCIL:

6 Q. One other question that occurs to me, Mr. Poe. Was there any
7 video recorded by any of your folks during this incident?

8 A. I don't -- that's a good question.

9 MR. CLAYTON: The folks that work for you.

10 MR. POE: I don't think any of my guys recorded anything. I
11 think we were all standing in the same spot, and looking back,
12 they did not. To my knowledge, they did not.

13 Q. Okay. Thank you.

14 MR. DOUGHERTY: Okay. Last opportunity for questions. Ms.
15 Stegmann.

16 MS. STEGMANN: Yes.

17 BY MS. STEGMANN:

18 Q. Good afternoon, Mr. Poe. This is Karenanne Stegmann with Oxy
19 Vinyls LP. I just wanted to see if there's any measurement or do
20 you have any information on the mechanical forces that are exerted
21 from the vent and burn process?

22 A. Not from my perspective. I'm not sure if somebody else has
23 done something. I have not and to my knowledge, no one in my
24 company has.

25 Q. Okay. And then I just have one last question is -- could you

1 give a little bit of a perspective of how often a vent and burn
2 process is utilized for -- that your company would perform one for
3 the railroad industry?

4 A. I didn't hear the first part of your question. Can you
5 repeat that?

6 Q. I'm just trying to understand how frequent this occurrence
7 would take place, and if you can't speak to the vent and burn or
8 explosive industry, how often is it done from your knowledge in
9 the --

10 A. Okay. I think I heard you say how frequent. Is that your
11 question?

12 Q. Yeah.

13 A. Okay. I would say very infrequent. It's not something that
14 the railroad uses. I've classified this in talks to railroads and
15 for conferences, where I've spoken about the vent and burn
16 process. It is always the last resort in a series of decisions
17 that are made at a derailment site. So it is not something that's
18 done very often. It's been several years since I've done one,
19 probably at least three since I've done one, and I'll never -- I
20 can honestly say that my father and I, you know, I grew up in this
21 industry and honestly I've never participated in a derailment
22 where I didn't feel like the railroad or its contractors had
23 exhausted every effort that would be, you know, considered
24 something safer than a vent and burn before it got down to the
25 vent and burn process. So I guess to clarify that, I've always

1 and I still feel this way, I think for a long time, it's always
2 the last resort in a series of decisions that are made by, you
3 know, not only the incident command structure, but the incident
4 command structure with regards to product experts and people that,
5 you know, conduct transfers for the railroad and industry experts
6 that have, you know, hundreds of years of knowledge in hazardous
7 materials with regulating them, transferring them and moving them.
8 So that's something that I consider again the last resort.

9 Q. Thank you.

10 MR. DOUGHERTY: Okay. Any other questions?

11 (No response.)

12 MR. DOUGHERTY: There are none.

13 BY MR. DOUGHERTY:

14 Q. Mr. Poe, I appreciate all the information and your time
15 today. My last question for you is understandably we've asked a
16 lot of questions. Is there anything that we haven't asked or is
17 there any additional information that you could provide to us that
18 may help our investigation or that you think would be important
19 for us to know?

20 A. No, sir, not at this time. I've pretty much covered
21 everything that I was involved in.

22 Q. All right. Fair enough. Well, if you do think of something
23 in the meantime, feel free to reach out to myself or Paul Stancil
24 or Mr. Ruben Payan who is on the call. He's the investigator-in-
25 charge for the accident.

1 A. I sure will.

2 Q. Okay. Perfect.

3 MR. DOUGHERTY: So with that, again thank you for your time.
4 I appreciate it. I think this is a good time to stop the
5 interview. The time is 1:50 p.m. Eastern Time. And I will stop
6 the --

7 (Whereupon, at 1:50 p.m. ET, 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 William Jason Poe

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD23MR005

PLACE: via Microsoft Teams

DATE: March 31, 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



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Transcript Errata

TABLE OF CORRECTIONS FOR TRANSCRIPT INTERVIEW WITH: JASON POE
RECORDED ON March 31, 2023

PAGE NUMBER	LINE NUMBER	CURRENT WORDING	CORRECTED WORDING
10	16	Strike "Full"	replace with "Pool"
10	16	Strike "tow"	replace with "into"
11	8	Strike "Bleedy"	replace with "Bleive"
12	19	Strike "Full"	replace with "Pool"
13	10	Strike "instrument"	replace with "Such"
19	23	Strike "EMD"	replace with "Zone"
24	19	Strike "Further"	replace with "furthest"
26	13	Strike "cars from"	replace with "charges on"
26	22	—	Add "Vent emit" before burn
26	24	Strike "was kind"	—
26	25	Strike "of had"	replace with "was being kept informed by"
26	25	Strike "being kept informed"	was being kept informed by
28	1	Strike "not"	replace with "no"
30	14	—	Add "a lot" after uses

If, to the best of your knowledge, no corrections are needed kindly circle the statement "no corrections needed" and initial in the space provided.

NO CORRECTIONS NEEDED.

Initials

[Redacted]

Printed Name of Person providing the above information

[Redacted]

Signature of Person providing the above information

4-13-23

Date