

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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NATURAL GAS-FUELED EXPLOSION OF *

RESIDENCE, DALLAS, TEXAS * Accident No.: PLD18FR002

FEBRUARY 23, 2018 *

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Interview of: HORACIO GARCIA

Walnut Hill Recreation Center
Dallas, Texas

Tuesday,
February 27, 2018

APPEARANCES:

RACHAEL GUNARATNAM, Hazardous Materials Accident
Investigator, Emergency Response Group
National Transportation Safety Board
(NTSB)

STEPHEN JENNER, Ph.D., Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board
(NTSB)

ALEXANDRIA COLLETTI, Accident Investigation
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration
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JOSE CHEVEREZ, Pipeline Inspector
Railroad Commission of Texas

JIM COLLINS, Regional Manager
Railroad Commission of Texas

PHILLIP MURDOCK, Director of Engineering and Compliance
Atmos Energy

TED PADGETT, Chief of Staff
Dallas Fire-Rescue

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I N T E R V I E W

(11:12 a.m.)

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3 MS. GUNARATNAM: Good morning. My name is Rachael Gunaratnam
4 and I am an investigator with the National Transportation Safety
5 Board. Today is February 27, 2018, and the time is 11:12 a.m. We
6 are currently at the Walnut Hill Rec Center in Dallas, Texas. We
7 are here to investigate the house explosion at Espanola Drive in
8 Dallas on Friday, February 23rd, 2018.

9 In this interview we will be talking to Chief Garcia. And I
10 will go around the room and please introduce yourself and spell
11 your name, and title.

12 MS. GUNARATNAM: My name is Rachael Gunaratnam, R-A-C-H-A-E-
13 L, G-U-N-A-R-A-T-N-A-M, and I'm a hazmat investigator with NTSB.

14 DR. JENNER: I'm Stephen Jenner, S-T-E-P-H-E-N, J-E-N-N-E-R.
15 I'm a human performance investigator with the NTSB.

16 MR. COLLINS: Jim Collins, J-I-M, C-O-L-L-I-N-S, regional
17 manager at the Railroad Commission of Texas.

18 MR. CHEVEREZ: Jose Cheverez, J-O-S-E, C-H-E-V-E-R-E-Z,
19 pipeline inspector for the Railroad Commission of Texas.

20 MR. PADGETT: Ted Padgett, Chief of Staff, Dallas Fire-
21 Rescue, P-A-D-G-E-T-T.

22 MS. COLLETTI: Alex Colletti, A-L-E-X, C-O-L-L-E-T-T-I,
23 PHMSA, Accident Investigation.

24 MR. MURDOCK: Phillip Murdock, P-H-I-L-L-I-P, M-U-R-D-O-C-K,
25 Director of Engineering and Compliance, Atmos Energy.

1 MS. GUNARATNAM: So before we start talking about -- oh,
2 sorry. Can you introduce yourself? Sorry.

3 CHIEF GARCIA: Horacio Garcia, Battalion Chief, District 7-C
4 shift. Horacio, H-O-R-A-C-I-O, Garcia, G-A-R-C-I-A.

5 MS. GUNARATNAM: Okay.

6 INTERVIEW OF HORACIO GARCIA

7 BY MS. GUNARATNAM:

8 Q. So before we start talking about the accident, maybe you can
9 give us a little bit of background about your job and your duties,
10 and also how long you've been with Dallas Fire-Rescue, and include
11 any training, if you want.

12 A. I'm currently -- been with Dallas Fire for 31 years. I'm
13 currently the Battalion Chief, District 7-C. We're considered a
14 ARFF station, covering Love Field Airport. We're also a USAR
15 chief, urban search and rescue; member of Texas Task Force 1.
16 I've been battalion chief for the last 4 years. Certifications, I
17 have a whole lot of them, but basically USAR and ARFF
18 certifications are the two big ones for my district.

19 Q. Thank you. You said you've been in this position for 4
20 years, battalion chief?

21 A. Four and a half years.

22 Q. Okay. So can you talk to us -- so, as you know, we're here
23 for the February -- Friday, February 23rd incident, but we also
24 understood that there were two other incidents on Wednesday,
25 February 21st, and Thursday, the 22nd. Can you tell us your

1 involvement in any of these incidents?

2 A. I responded February 21st, the morning of. It was -- I
3 remember waking up about 5:50 in the morning. I reported the
4 structure fire on Durango. We got en route, and Engine 43 was
5 first in and reported out with a lot of smoke and fire coming out
6 the back and through the roof. Truck 43 was right behind them and
7 reported out the same thing. I don't really remember -- I
8 remember somebody saying possible explosion. I might have been
9 the officer on Truck 43. I pulled up maybe within 30 seconds
10 after Truck 43, and gave the same size-up of a residential home
11 with fire coming through the roof.

12 The initial -- (phone interruption) -- initial actions,
13 Engine 43 laid a cross (indiscernible), prepared for interior
14 attack from 43. We were just evaluating to see if they needed
15 ventilated the house. We were looking for -- my first action when
16 I got out the car was to see if anybody was in the house or if
17 everybody got out.

18 Right away, I was told at the front yard -- some relatives
19 lived next door to the house that was involved, and they were
20 inside their house. So quick action was to make sure the exposure
21 on their house didn't catch fire, so I wanted to protect that
22 exposure while everybody was getting in place. Second engine
23 bring water.

24 Popped my head, inside the house, made sure everybody out.
25 They said everybody was out. There were two victims there. One,

1 quick look, had burns to his face. The other one had some type of
2 injury to his feet. The ambulance was right behind me and they
3 started to do their assessment, so I went back to doing the
4 incident command of the fire.

5 One thing I did notice about the house which was of concern,
6 that my -- the second arriving battalion chief, Battalion 9's
7 Scott Clumpner, advised me, as he was doing a walk around the
8 house, that the walls were bulging. So I did a quick look also.
9 This house had some type of stucco siding that was either tied
10 some how by glue, it looked like to the wood siding. So it was an
11 older home that was updated. So those walls on what I would call
12 the bravo and delta side, to the right and left of the house, were
13 bulging out. I do not know if that was caused by the heat melting
14 the glue or if there was some type of explosion that caused that
15 stucco to come off. So I wasn't aware of what caused that.

16 We soon called for Atmos and Oncor, and also the arson
17 investigators. The fire -- the house was, looked like it was
18 remodeled, some addition added to it. So the fire was contained
19 to the back of the house and the engine crew put the fire out
20 pretty quick. The issue we had was just a lot of smoldering and a
21 lot of smoke created by the Styrofoam that was attached to the
22 house that was just smoldering. But we were able to put the fire
23 out pretty quick.

24 Atmos soon arrived. I say soon, I don't know, I don't know a
25 time frame. But they arrived. I talked to the Atmos rep. Told

1 him what we had, and he drove around to the back alley to cut the
2 gas off and came back out and confirmed that the gas was off. And
3 I believe we had one victim, the one that had burns to the face,
4 that was transported to Parkland. The other one, I was told,
5 refused to go. And that's basically the extent of that house
6 fire.

7 We were -- again, we tapped it out pretty quick. I think we
8 tapped it out within 30, 45 minutes, and did a primary and
9 secondary search to confirm no one else was there. And I spoke to
10 the two arson investigators had pulled up. I think it was Julie
11 Kumar and, I believe her name is Westbrook -- am I correct Chief
12 Padgett, Westbrook?

13 MR. PADGETT: Yes. Yes.

14 MR. GARCIA: Gave them a quick briefing of what we saw when
15 we arrived, you know, about the burn victims, and they started
16 doing their investigation. I left the scene before they were
17 finished, and that was the extent of my involvement from that
18 house fire on Durango.

19 BY MS. GUNARATNAM:

20 Q. Okay. So you say it was extinguished between 30, 40 minutes
21 of your arrival?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Okay. And could you tell me when you arrived, the nature of
24 the fire?

25 A. There would -- well, the nature of the fire, there was a lot

1 of fire coming out the back and it was going through the roof. So
2 there was heavy fire involvement in the rear of the house when we
3 arrived.

4 Q. Okay. And did you see the bulging --

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. -- in the wall?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Okay. Did you -- what -- after the fire was out, what did
9 the house look like afterwards?

10 A. Those two sides, the right and left side of the house, of
11 course, the stucco was attached to some type of Styrofoam that was
12 attached to the original wood siding, and they were bowed outward
13 from the top down. They weren't collapsed, but they were bulging
14 out.

15 Q. Did you talk to, I believe the one -- the injured who -- to
16 the face? Did you talk to him about, like, what he was doing
17 or --

18 A. No, ma'am. I was more concerned just about their injury,
19 getting an ambulance there to treat their injuries. I just wanted
20 to make sure everybody was out.

21 Q. Right. Okay. Did you talk to the other relatives at all
22 afterwards or --

23 A. No.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. About the cause of the fire, what they were doing? No,

1 ma'am.

2 Q. Okay. And so, you went to the house to make sure that the
3 fire wasn't going to go to their house?

4 A. Right. I was trying to -- the way the fire was and the way
5 the structure was involved with fire, my concern was it was going
6 to catch the house next door on fire.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. So we had to lay another line in there just to protect that
9 exposure.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. But it never caught the second house.

12 Q. So did you -- when you spoke to Atmos and they arrived on the
13 scene, when did you start tackling the fire? Was it after they
14 had shut off the gas or --

15 A. Oh, way before. Right when we arrived we started attacking
16 the fire.

17 Q. Oh, okay.

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. All right. And then they shut off the gas and --

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. -- you guys were still battling the fire.

22 A. Well, after he turned off the gas, it was pretty much
23 contained, put out.

24 Q. Okay. Oh, okay, after he turned off --

25 A. Yeah. Atmos probably showed -- I don't have the times, but

1 probably -- I can't recall, maybe 20, 30 minutes after we arrived.

2 Q. Okay. Did you notice anything on the roof or anything
3 like --

4 A. The whole roof, I mean, the fire -- the roof that was burned,
5 I mean, it was charred. I didn't see anything other than it was
6 just -- it was burnt. It was completely burned in the rear of the
7 house and on the roof.

8 Q. And did you do a perimeter walk after the fire was out?

9 A. Yes. I did several.

10 Q. Okay. And what were you looking -- what did you observe and
11 see?

12 A. Well, I was observing -- I was keeping an eye on the stucco
13 walls just to make sure they weren't moving any further than what
14 they were. Because if they were to collapse, it was pretty heavy.
15 I mean, we had put some tape, a little bit of tape around one side
16 of the house just to warn people, other firefighters, be careful
17 this wall is bulging. So my concern was just it not moving any
18 more. That was my concern, was the collapse of the two walls.

19 Q. And was there any -- what did -- was there any holes in the
20 ceiling or the roof?

21 A. After the fire?

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. Oh, yes.

24 Q. Oh, okay.

25 A. Yeah, it was -- the rear of the house was burnt through the

1 roof, and the -- I can't -- I'm trying to remember because it
2 looked like an add-on; all that was burnt.

3 Q. Okay. Would you characterize the hole as something that
4 occurred from the fire or from an explosion or --

5 A. I couldn't answer that.

6 Q. When you came did you see glass on the ground or --

7 A. No. No, I didn't.

8 Q. Okay. How -- sorry -- how many engines showed up?

9 A. Well, the alarm, it was three engines, two fire trucks, two
10 battalion chiefs, one rescue initially, and I think we called for
11 a second one.

12 Q. Okay. Okay. So what time did you guys leave the scene?

13 A. I left the scene, me as BC, I believe I left right about
14 6:40 --

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. -- and I left Engine 43 in command of the fire. There was
17 still three engines, I believe, when I left -- maybe three, two or
18 three engines and one truck, and I left the engine in command of
19 the fire, I gave that update to the fire dispatcher.

20 Q. Okay. And were you incident commander for that incident?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Okay. Did you -- as you did the walk-around, did you notice
23 any appliances outside the house?

24 A. No, ma'am.

25 Q. Okay. Like a heater or -- nothing?

1 A. No.

2 MS. GUNARATNAM: Okay. Okay, I'll pass you off to --

3 BY DR. JENNER:

4 Q. This is Steve Jenner, NTSB. Just a couple questions. When
5 -- I think you said soon after you arrived, you got a report of a
6 possible explosion?

7 A. I believe that report came from Truck 43, the captain. He
8 gave a, he gave that -- you'll have to pull the tapes, which
9 company gave that, possible explosion. I never gave that report.
10 I couldn't -- because I didn't hear it, I couldn't determine if
11 there was an explosion, at my level, arriving first battalion
12 chief.

13 Q. Right. Do you know on what basis they made that conclusion
14 or --

15 A. No, sir. I never -- I haven't spoken to the captain about
16 it.

17 Q. Okay. You had communications with the Atmos official when
18 they arrived?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Can you just detail that conversation please?

21 A. I just gave him -- he had -- what I recall, he came up, he
22 introduced himself, and I said, I believe, you know, we need the
23 gas cut off, and he said, is it safe to walk down the side of the
24 house? I said, yes, you can walk down the side. Then he came
25 back and said, I want to go ahead and drive my vehicle to the

1 alley and cut the gas off from the alley. That was the extent of
2 the first conversation. Second one, he just came back out and
3 confirmed that the gas was off.

4 Q. Do you know how long it took him for that process?

5 A. It would -- probably less than 5 minutes. It wasn't very
6 long.

7 Q. And from your impression, things went according to plan --

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. -- from his part?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Okay. Do you have an opinion, if this was explosion related?

12 A. No, I don't have an opinion. I can't give you -- can't
13 answer that one.

14 DR. JENNER: Okay, that's fair. Great. That's all I have.
15 Thank you.

16 MS. GUNARATNAM: Jim?

17 MR. COLLINS: No questions. No questions

18 BY MS. COLLETTI:

19 Q. Hi, Alex Colletti. Was there anything unusual when fighting
20 the fire, say, like a fire under the subfloor or anything that
21 struck you as odd?

22 A. I didn't see anything odd. From my perspective, being
23 outside and never entered the house when the initial fire
24 attacked, so I didn't see anything at my level.

25 MS. COLLETTI: Okay. Thank you.

1 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No questions.

2 BY MS. GUNARATNAM:

3 Q. I just had one or two follow-up. Did you -- when you arrived
4 on scene and the fire was out, did you smell anything different,
5 like gas or anything?

6 A. No, ma'am.

7 Q. Okay. And when Atmos, after they turned off the meter, did
8 they stick around?

9 A. I have no idea where he went --

10 Q. Oh, okay.

11 A. -- if he left or if he stayed around. I didn't pay
12 attention. When he told me it was off --

13 Q. That's all you --

14 A. -- I had other things I was concerned about.

15 Q. Okay. All right. Have you ever responded to a gas incident
16 before?

17 A. It's been years, but I have before. As a house explosion, I
18 haven't.

19 Q. No. Oh, okay.

20 A. No.

21 Q. What have you responded to related to gas?

22 A. Well, related to gas, just gas leaks, just natural gas leaks,
23 ruptured lines, people smelling gas in their home. But I've never
24 been involved with a house explosion.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. I mean, I'm not saying this was an explosion. But I've never
2 had any experience of dealing, as an incident commander, with a
3 house explosion.

4 Q. Okay. So you know what gas smells like though and --

5 A. Um-hum.

6 Q. Yeah. Okay.

7 A. Yes.

8 MS. GUNARATNAM: Okay. Does anybody else have follow-up?

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Nope.

10 MS. GUNARATNAM: Okay. All right. Thank you.

11 (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: NATURAL GAS-FUELED EXPLOSION OF
RESIDENCE, DALLAS, TEXAS
FEBRUARY 23, 2018
Interview of Horacio Garcia

ACCIDENT NO.: PLD18FR002

PLACE: Dallas, Texas

DATE: February 27, 2018

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.



Deborah D. Sweigart
Transcriber