

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

\* \* \* \* \*

Investigation of: \*

NATURAL GAS-FUELED EXPLOSION OF \*  
RESIDENCE, DALLAS, TEXAS \*  
FEBRUARY 23, 2018 \*

\* Accident No.: PLD18FR002

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: JULIE KUMAR

Dallas Fire-Rescue Station 35  
3839 Walnut Hill Lane  
Dallas, Texas

Monday,  
February 26, 2018

## APPEARANCES:

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

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

ALEX COLLETTI, Accident Investigator  
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration  
(PHMSA)

TED PADGETT, Chief of Staff  
Dallas Fire and Rescue

JIM COLLINS, Regional Manager  
Railroad Commission of Texas

PHILLIP MURDOCK, Director of Engineering and Compliance  
Atmos Energy

I N D E X

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I N T E R V I E W

(1:55 p.m.)

1  
2  
3 DR. JENNER: Good morning. My name is Stephen Jenner. I'm  
4 an investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board in  
5 Washington, D.C. Today is February 26, 2018. The time is 11:55  
6 Central Time. We are currently at the Dallas Fire and Rescue  
7 Station 35, and that's 3839 Walnut Hill Lane in Dallas. We are  
8 here in response to the house explosion on Espanola Drive in  
9 Dallas that occurred on February 23, 2018.

10 We will now be talking to Ms. Julie Kumar, but before that,  
11 I'd like to go around the room and have everyone introduce  
12 themselves. So if you would, just state your name and spelling,  
13 title and who're with?

14 Again, I'm Stephen Jenner, S-T-E-P-H-E-N, J-E-N-N-E-R, with  
15 the NTSB. To my right --

16 MS. GUNARATNAM: Rachael Gunaratnam, R-A-C-H-A-E-L,  
17 G-U-N-A-R-A-T-N-A-M, hazmat investigator with the NTSB.

18 CHIEF PADGETT: Chief of Staff, Ted Padgett, Dallas Fire-  
19 Rescue, Papa-Alpha-Delta-Golf-Echo-Tango-Tango.

20 MR. COLLINS: Jim Collins, regional manager with the Texas  
21 Railroad Commission; J-I-M, C-O-L-L-I-N-S.

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

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

1 MS. KUMAR: Julie Kumar, J-U-L-I-E, K-U-M-A-R, lieutenant  
2 with Dallas Fire-Rescue, Arson Investigations.

3 INTERVIEW OF JULIE KUMAR

4 BY DR. JENNER:

5 Q. Thank you. Can we continue if I call you Julie?

6 A. Sure.

7 Q. Great. Thank you. If you would, just tell me a little bit  
8 about your background, how you got started in the Fire and Rescue,  
9 and you worked your way up to your current position.

10 A. Okay. I've been on for 17 years currently. And I started  
11 out as a fire prevention officer with the Fire Inspections  
12 Division of Dallas Fire-Rescue. I promoted up to senior fire  
13 prevention officer a few years later, and then promoted to  
14 lieutenant. After being in the Inspections Division for 12 years,  
15 I then transferred to Fire Investigations, Arson Division, and  
16 that entailed me going through the Dallas Police Academy and  
17 getting a peace officer certification, and also attending Collin  
18 College for my arson certification.

19 I started on the job -- it was October 2014, I started on the  
20 job training, and by January 2015, I started as an arson  
21 investigator.

22 Q. Have you been working in that capacity since January 2015?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Okay. And out of where? Out of what fire --

25 A. Dallas Fire-Rescue, the Investigations Division for Dallas

1 Fire-Rescue, located at 1551 Baylor Street, Suite 500, in Dallas  
2 Texas.

3 Q. Great. Okay. We are looking to primarily a house explosion  
4 on -- that occurred on February 23rd, but there are other  
5 incidents that previous week that we're also interested in.

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. I understand that you responded to one of those?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. If you could talk about that, and just start us off how your  
10 day started and tell us your story.

11 A. My day started on Tuesday, February the 20th, at 7:30 in the  
12 morning. I honestly don't remember how many calls that we had  
13 that day, but I know that this particular fire at 3527 Durango  
14 Drive came in 5:49 the following morning, on February the 21st.  
15 We were dispatched to that fire at that time, and we put ourselves  
16 en route to the fire and arrived shortly after that.

17       Once we arrived on scene, I bunked out. My partner actually  
18 stayed on the outskirts and spoke to the residents of the home  
19 while I began to take pictures of the house that was affected.  
20 And I started off in the front of the house, went all the way  
21 around starting on the delta side of the house, and took pictures  
22 of the electrical meter outside, the gas meter, and basically went  
23 all the way around the house, back to the front. Entered in  
24 through the front door and started to take pictures of the least  
25 burned areas and then made my way to the most burned affected

1 area.

2 Due to the fact that the back room was so badly damaged and  
3 the floor was unstable, I was not able to enter into that area. I  
4 did take pictures from the doorway leading in from the inside of  
5 the house. There was also a door that led into that back room  
6 from the exterior of the house. So I was able to take pictures  
7 from both angles.

8 Initially upon taking pictures, it was very smoky still, so  
9 you could hardly see what was in the room. After a little bit of  
10 time passed, I was able to take a few pictures once the smoke  
11 cleared. Even still, it was so badly damaged that you couldn't  
12 really make much of the room. I could tell that there was a  
13 restroom in the very back portion on the back wall, but everything  
14 within that room was pretty well damaged. I also noticed remnants  
15 from inside of that room onto the roof, like it had blown up onto  
16 that roof, onto the exterior of the roof, and I did get pictures  
17 of that.

18 My primary assessment -- in my primary assessment of the  
19 fire, all I knew was that that back bedroom was severely damaged.  
20 It wasn't until I connected back with my partner that we were able  
21 to kind of exchange information of what I saw and who she talked  
22 to, that I was able to confirm that the owner of the house woke up  
23 that morning to a noise coming from the gas heater. He got up to  
24 investigate what the noise was, and as he approached the gas  
25 heater, from his statement, he stated that at that time it

1 exploded and he was thrown back a few feet from the explosion.  
2 From that explosion, he suffered second degree burns to his face  
3 and to his right knee, I believe. Let me just check that. Yes,  
4 his right knee.

5 I also know from my partner talking to the occupant's son,  
6 who was asleep in that back room, he woke up to debris that was on  
7 top of him. He suffered minor scratches and refused to be  
8 transported. I also know from my partner speaking with the  
9 homeowner -- no, the homeowner's son stated that there was a gas  
10 leak a few weeks prior to the fire and that the back bedroom was a  
11 new addition that was built a few years ago.

12 We then left the scene and went to Parkland Hospital where  
13 the father had been transported, to confirm that he had burns,  
14 second degree burns to his face and to his right knee.

15 Oh, and also just looking at my report, I'll state what the  
16 operations side, what their initial size-up was. It was Truck 43  
17 who responded first up at the location. Once they got out, they  
18 reported smoke showing from the back of the house, and they began  
19 a quick attack of the fire at that point. And then soon after is  
20 when they requested us to the scene.

21 Q. Thank you for that. Now they requested you to the scene.  
22 Now do they always request you to a scene?

23 A. They're required to request us if there's structure damage.  
24 If there's structure damage or if there appears to be a set fire  
25 or if they're not able to determine what the cause of the fire is,



1 they'll call for us.

2 Q. Okay. And why does structure damage prompt a call to you?

3 A. Mainly for a record of the fire, the fact that the fire did  
4 happen, how much damage occurred as a result of the fire, and then  
5 it's a tool then that insurance companies can use whenever the  
6 homeowner or commercial business were to file a claim --

7 Q. Right.

8 A. -- the insurance company can request that report to make a  
9 decision of whether to file a claim or not.

10 Q. Okay. You had talked about your partner.

11 A. Um-hum.

12 Q. We didn't get a name.

13 A. Captain Westbrook. Captain Simmy Westbrook,

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Simmeana Westbrook.

16 Q. That's who I thought it was. I just wanted to hear it from  
17 you.

18 A. Okay.

19 Q. Okay, and just to clarify your story, or the story that you  
20 understand is that the father heard a noise and approached --

21 A. The gas heater.

22 Q. -- the gas heater, but he never arrived to it?

23 A. I don't know whether he actually went up the heater and did  
24 anything to it.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. I just know that he approached it and there was an explosion.  
2 I don't know, I don't know the details --

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. -- of whether he actually touched it or not or did anything  
5 to it.

6 Q. And the son, who I think your partner talked to, did -- just  
7 curious about his approximate age? Is -- a young adult or a young  
8 person?

9 A. I believe he was 19.

10 Q. Oh.

11 A. He is 19.

12 Q. And can you talk about any other people in the house and  
13 their injuries?

14 A. There were three other people, three other occupants, ages  
15 38, 16 and 15, in the house. They did not suffer any injuries.

16 Q. And they were the ones -- one of the family members told you  
17 that the house addition was from a few years ago?

18 A. Yes. I believe it was the 19-year-old.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Who my partner spoke with.

21 Q. Okay. For some reason I had in my mind it was a very recent  
22 addition, but that's just me making up stories, but --

23 A. Yeah, they're -- right. They're saying a few years ago, so I  
24 don't know. I don't have an approximate time.

25 Q. Okay. Did anyone of them talk about smelling -- did they

1 comment either way or asked about smelling any gas prior to?

2 A. No. I don't recall.

3 Q. So it was just hearing something, and it wasn't smelling or  
4 seeing or anything?

5 A. No. It was more so hearing something coming from the gas  
6 heater.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. And he woke up to that noise, I believe.

9 Q. All right.

10 A. Everyone else was still asleep.

11 Q. Okay. And this is only if you're comfortable answering this.  
12 We're -- you know we, we walked around the house and we saw the --  
13 from the outside --

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. -- to an extent; we didn't go in ourselves. The extent of  
16 the damage, have you, in your experience, could that be caused  
17 just by a gas heater exploding without the absence of a large  
18 amount of gas, or do you think the presence of gas is necessary  
19 for that amount of damage?

20 A. No. In my experience, I have seen damage of that nature from  
21 other causes. I couldn't say specifically gas or not.

22 Q. Okay. So you've seen extensive damage where you -- it hasn't  
23 been attributed to a gas leak?

24 A. Yes. We've seen damage of that nature, or even worse, with  
25 an electrical short, where it was possibly electrical. The

1 occupants may have had numerous issues with electrical issues in  
2 the past days or weeks, and then they complain of maybe flickering  
3 of lights prior to the fire.

4 Q. Right.

5 A. So that's just one instance where there's been extensive  
6 damage from something else. This is actually my first time  
7 investigating something to do with -- something gas related  
8 possibly, if that's what it is.

9 Q. Okay. Did you examine the back of the house, the meters, or  
10 any other things of that nature?

11 A. Yes. The extent that I did that was just taking pictures.

12 Q. Okay. Can you share your observations about what you saw?

13 A. It looked like a typical gas meter.

14 Q. Okay. Was it damaged at the time?

15 A. It did not appear damaged to me at the time.

16 Q. Was there anything in the back that you think could have --  
17 well, been an ignition source, or are you pretty confident from  
18 your investigation that it was just the heater?

19 A. I'm confident to the extent that since the homeowner stated  
20 that he heard the noise coming from that specific appliance, that  
21 is why I classified it the way I did, from his statement.

22 Q. Right. Did the addition that we talked about that was build  
23 a few years ago, when --

24 A. Right.

25 Q. In your, whatever level of inspection you did, was there

1 anything suspicious with that?

2 A. The only thing I noticed out of the ordinary was that the  
3 electric meter was not easily visible, as they usually are when I  
4 typically do the outside examination. Because this addition had  
5 been added on, it was in kind of a weird place.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. It was higher up than it normally is and it was kind of  
8 hidden. That's the only observation that I had.

9 Q. Okay. Are you aware if any -- if the electric company or gas  
10 company were called as a result of this?

11 A. Yes. I know that there was a representative from the gas  
12 company on location that morning.

13 Q. Did you have any conversation with them?

14 A. Nothing specific to -- he actually showed me the gas meter  
15 because I initially couldn't find it. It was way far back, in the  
16 back of the yard, and so I didn't find it initially. And so I did  
17 ask him to show me.

18 Q. Right.

19 A. And so he showed me.

20 Q. Did -- were they doing any work on the meters or anything gas  
21 related?

22 A. Not that I observed.

23 Q. Okay. So who had the most conversation with them when they  
24 arrived scene?

25 A. I believe that my partner, Captain Westbrook, spoke to him.

1 I'm not sure exactly what they spoke about, but I think that they  
2 spoke more extensive than I did.

3 DR. JENNER: Okay. Very good. That's the questions I have.  
4 We'll pass it around the room for some follow-ups.

5 MS. KUMAR: Okay.

6 BY MS. GUNARATNAM:

7 Q. This is Rachael, NTSB. So can you walk us through when you  
8 started to take the photos of the damages, specifically regarding  
9 that to the -- you said you started with less damaged, least  
10 damaged to the most damaged?

11 A. Right. I believe when I walked in through the front, I took  
12 pictures of that initial room. And then I believe that there was  
13 a hallway outside of that initial room that went to the left, that  
14 had two bedrooms on either side of the hallway and a restroom,  
15 which I took pictures of, leading up to and into the rooms. I  
16 then came back out. There was a room directly opposite from the  
17 hallway; I believe it was a dining room. And so I entered that  
18 room, took pictures of that room. Came back out and went down the  
19 hallway leading into the most affected area, took pictures of that  
20 immediate room, and then went back into the most affected area.

21 Q. So where is the fire damage as you were walking in?  
22 Everything have fire damage, or --

23 A. As I walked in, the only place that had fire damage was that  
24 back room.

25 Q. So those two bedrooms that -- when you said you walked in

1 initially they were --

2 A. They were fine.

3 Q. Fine.

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. Oh, okay. So can you describe, as you were approaching that  
6 back room, what kind of damage you were seeing?

7 A. Pretty much that whole room, the -- actually as I was taking  
8 the pictures, when you're walking into that most affected room,  
9 there's a wall to the right. It actually collapsed. And the roof  
10 was caving in. It had severe, severe burn damage in that back  
11 room.

12 Q. And what was the -- that room you're saying is the bathroom?

13 A. No. It was actually an addition. It was a bedroom with a  
14 bathroom on the outside of it.

15 Q. Bedroom with a bathroom attached?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. Okay. And how was the bedroom, was it burned?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. Oh. That whole addition was burned?

20 A. That whole addition was burned. You could still see the  
21 bathroom in the very back, you could see where it had soot damage,  
22 but you could still see tiles that were on the floor and on the  
23 wall of the bathroom, and you could see the toilet. So it was  
24 mainly that interior room that had the most damage. You could  
25 still make out parts of the restroom. So that was kind of weird

1 to me, how it just stopped there and went -- you could still see  
2 the restroom.

3 Q. Right. And when you started taking pictures of the bathroom,  
4 did you see the heater?

5 A. I did not. I never saw the heater.

6 Q. Never saw the heater.

7 A. No.

8 Q. Oh, okay. What did the bathroom look like exactly?

9 A. It had white tiles and it was a fairly -- it was a, it was a  
10 small bathroom, and it was long-ways. You walked in -- I don't  
11 know if it has a shower. I could make out a sink; it was one of  
12 those pedestal sinks. And then there was a toilet on this side.

13 Q. All right. Was the walls all intact or were they gone?

14 A. You could see -- actually that back wall, I believe, was  
15 still intact. I'll have to go back and look at the pictures to  
16 verify, but I believe that that back wall was still intact because  
17 you could still see the tiles.

18 Q. Okay. So you guys concluded that there was an explosion, so  
19 what -- could you tell from direction of where --

20 A. I could tell from the fact that there were remnants from that  
21 bedroom that flew up onto the roof outside, that it had to be an  
22 explosion of some sort for the materials in the room to be up on  
23 the roof.

24 Q. So there was a hole in the roof, right?

25 A. Yes.



1 Q. Yeah. Okay. Did you guys ever recover the heater?

2 A. No.

3 Q. And did you see the gas line entering into the house?

4 A. I believe it was underground, because it was so far back --

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. -- on the back of the property, it had to have been  
7 underground.

8 Q. Right, the -- and then it would go into the house --

9 A. No, I didn't see that.

10 Q. -- with the riser? Oh, okay.

11 A. I didn't see that. And it could be in my pictures. I'll  
12 just have to go back and look at my pictures.

13 Q. It would have looked like a pipe just going into that house.

14 A. Okay.

15 MS. GUNARATNAM: Okay. Yeah, I think that's all for now.

16 DR. JENNER: Okay. Chief?

17 BY MR. PADGETT:

18 Q. Yes. L-T, did -- I guess what I heard you say is no one  
19 knows where the heater is. You didn't see it in top the -- or in  
20 a photo on the roof or anything, where all the other stuff was?

21 A. No.

22 MR. PADGETT: Okay. That's all I have.

23 DR. JENNER: Jim?

24 MR. COLLINS: No questions (indiscernible) --

25 MR. MURDOCK: Nothing.

1 BY MS. COLLETTI:

2 Q, Alex Colletti. I have just one for you. Have you ever done  
3 any training with the gas company, Atmos, on what a gas fire might  
4 look like or any specific training?

5 A. No, I haven't.

6 Q. Oh. I'm sorry. I have one more actually. You said you  
7 didn't have a lot of contact with the Atmos employee that was on-  
8 site aside from showing you the meter?

9 A. Um-hum.

10 Q. Does Atmos ever like request a fire -- you know, your report?

11 A. They do. Lately they've been asking for -- it's not our  
12 incident number. I can't remember -- it's usually my partner that  
13 talks to them. I don't remember what it is that they ask for, but  
14 there is some information that they ask for, for their report.  
15 And lately I've noticed that they do ask for that.

16 Q. Okay. But they haven't like formerly even, like, what's your  
17 official -- you know, was this a gas fire or not and we'd like to  
18 see some official paperwork on that? Nothing, nothing like that?

19 A. No. They've never asked to see official paperwork.  
20 Sometimes they will tell us, you know, if the -- they'll tell us  
21 if the gas was on.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. And they'll verify for us that it has been shut off. And in  
24 some occasions we've talked about what the cause might be.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. But not every time.

2 Q. But not every time. Okay. Thank you.

3 DR. JENNER: Great. Thanks. I'll look around the room if  
4 there are any follow-ups. Okay.

5 BY MS. GUNARATNAM:

6 Q. Do you know how to use the gas meter, a detector?

7 A. A gas detector?

8 Q. Um-hum.

9 A. I have been, I have been shown how to use it.

10 Q. Have you ever had to use it?

11 A. I've never had to use it.

12 Q. Is there a reason to ever use it? Like --

13 A. If there's -- if there could be a presence of carbon monoxide  
14 or some sort of gas in that nature, we may have to use it. But  
15 usually our firefighters will have that on their trucks and  
16 they'll do that for us, if we need to.

17 Q. So when you and your partner are on scene, it's usually --  
18 everything's contained by then?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Yeah. So it's safe for you to do your investigation.

21 A. Right.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. And incident command will let us know whether it's safe or  
24 not to enter, so we'll communicate with them.

25 Q. Okay. Oh, I had one more question about the damages outside.

1 Did you notice, like, glass being blown out or do you know if that  
2 was --

3 A. I didn't notice any glass.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. It was dark still at that time and there was a lot of foam.  
6 The foam that the firefighters use, there was a lot of that on the  
7 ground outside. So if there was glass, it would have been hard  
8 to, it would have been hard to see.

9 MS. GUNARATNAM: Okay. I'm done.

10 DR. JENNER: Okay. Chief, anything else?

11 MR. PADGETT: No, sir.

12 DR. JENNER: I'm looking around. Terrific.

13 Thank you very much. I'm going to ask you one question.  
14 We've been asking all the questions of you. Is there anything we  
15 didn't ask that you would think would help us in our  
16 investigation?

17 MS. KUMAR: I can't think of anything.

18 DR. JENNER: Okay. I just throw it out there --

19 MS. KUMAR: Okay.

20 DR. JENNER: Okay. Well, thank you very much for taking time  
21 here.

22 MS. KUMAR: Okay. Yeah, no problem.

23 DR. JENNER: It's 12:20. We're all done.

24 (Whereupon, at 12:20 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

25

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 Julie Kumar

ACCIDENT NO.:               PLD18FR002

PLACE:                       Dallas, Texas

DATE:                        February 26, 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