



## U.S. COAST GUARD WITNESS STATEMENT FORM

(Please Print Clearly)

Witness Name:	LT. [REDACTED]	Employer Name:	United States Coast Guard
Street Address:	[REDACTED]	Employer Address:	[REDACTED]
City/State/Zip:	[REDACTED]	City/State/Zip:	[REDACTED]
Phone No:	[REDACTED]	Phone No:	[REDACTED]
Position:	Investigation Officer	License/Doc. #	N/A.

I, the undersigned, make the following statement voluntarily, without threat, duress or promise of reward:

I conducted an in-person interview on 15 NOV 2022, at 1206 local time, with Don Horaist (Private Fire Investigator retained by New Orleans Steamboat Company). David Flaherty (NTSB Investigator) virtually attended the interview as well. The purpose of this interview was to summarize the collective findings from the evidence that was removed from the NATCHEZ post-generator compartment fire. The evidence was analyzed at a forensic lab in Covington, LA.

Mr. Horaist stated that two out of the three private fire investigators agreed that the fire’s most probable start location was forward of the switch gear frame in forward section of the generator compartment. This is based on the burn pattern, but it was noted that the burn pattern was not a perfect “V” pattern. The dissenting fire investigator’s opinion was that the fire originated in the aft port corner of the generator compartment.

Mr. Horaist stated that overall, the ignition source was not known. It was difficult to detect the source of the fire.

Mr. Horaist stated that the three private fire investigators agreed on the following live electrical sources prior to the fire: 1) a single electrical cord (no splices observed) connected between the main distribution panel in the galley. It penetrated the forward bulkhead of the generator compartment and ran along the overhead in the generator compartment. It extended aft through the aft generator compartment bulkhead and continued down a ladder well in the engine room compartment. In the deck below the generator compartment it supplied electrical power to a potable water pump. The private investigators identified electrical activity (arching) on the cord before it passed through the aft bulkhead of the generator compartment. This indicated that the cord was live during the fire. The private investigators agree that this was a potential source of the fire, but also agree that the identified arching on the cord was a result of exposure to the fire; and, 2) the strung-up light bulbs in the generator compartment. The exact location of the electrical hanging lights was not entirely known due to the fire damage. However, the private fire investigators did identify a mix of compact fluorescent light bulbs (do not get hot on the globe, but on the socket) and incandescent light bulbs (obtain the highest temperatures at the globe). Historically (and under the correct conditions), incandescent light bulbs could start a fire if combustible items were near the globe (traditionally closest fires, because people would pile items up to the level of an exposed light bulb). The lights were supplied with electrical power via a “spider box” [the same “spider box” that LT [REDACTED] observed on the main deck near the starboard side entrance to the engine room post-03 MAY 2022]. The strung-up lights may have been a source of the fire.

Mr. Horaist stated the last person to leave the generator compartment was Mr. Craig Morvant (Southern Diesel). Mr. Morvant left at approximately 1835.

Mr. Horaist stated the alarm time for the New Orleans Fire Department was 2000.

Mr. Horaist stated that on 03 MAY, the Dixie Marine hot worker was “weld washing” on the switchgear frame in the overhead starting at the forward starboard side of the switch gear. Mr. Horasit stated that he spoke with an individual with knowledge of hot work and believed (based on the photograph taken on 03 MAY 2022, at approximately 1530 local time) that the Dixie Marine worker would have needed at least thirty more minutes to complete the “weld wash.” The “weld washing” removed a section of the edge of the switchgear in the overhead. The referenced photograph still depicts the edge prior to its removal by the hot work. The private fire investigators observed that the edge from the switch gear was removed during their post-fire investigation of the switch gear frame.

Mr. Horaist stated that the New Orleans Steamboat did not have a marine chemist in attendance prior to the hot work.

Mr. Horasit stated that he was not aware if Dixie Marine had a hot work chit, or not.

Mr. Horaist stated that during his conversations, as part of his investigation, he did learn that the C/E and at least two deckhands on the NATCHEZ were concerned about sparks/slag from the hot work landing near the old generator (mid-ship/port side generator). As a result, an approximately 04 foot by 08 foot piece of sheet metal was placed on the outboard side (port side) of the old generator. Slag was a potential source of the fire.

Mr. Horasit also stated that he allegedly heard the fire watch was positioned (duration of time unknown) on the engine room side of the aft generator compartment bulkhead [note there are two entry ways along that bulkhead – a port side and a starboard side entrance way. In the center were CO2 bottles for the fixed fire fighting system].

I have read my statement as documented above (and, if applicable, on continuation pages), and to the best of my knowledge and belief, it is true and correct.

//S//LT.   
SIGNATURE

15 NOV 2022  
DATE