

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

\* \* \* \* \*

Investigation of:

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

NATURAL GAS BUILDING EXPLOSION &  
FIRE NEAR WEST READING,  
PENNSYLVANIA, ON MARCH 24, 2023

Accident No.: PLD23LR002

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: DONNA NEWMAN, 2nd Shift Supervisor  
RM Palmer

Wyomissing, Pennsylvania

Thursday,  
April 20th, 2023

APPEARANCES:

SARA LYONS, Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

KIM WEST, Investigator in Charge  
National Transportation Safety Board

GARY BAUMAN, Engineer  
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration

SHERYL HARLEY, Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board.

CHRIS WHITEASH, Engineer  
Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, Gas Safety

LOGAN SMITH, VP of Operations  
RM Palmer

COREY WRIGHT, Attorney  
Wilson Elser

I N D E X

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Donna Newman:	
By Ms. Lyons	5
By Ms. West	14
By Mr. Bauman	18
By Ms. Harley	20
By Mr. Whiteash	25
By Unidentified	27
By Ms. Lyons	27
By Ms. West	30
By Unidentified	32
By Ms. Harley	33
By Ms. Whiteash	33

I N T E R V I E W

(9:08 a.m.)

1  
2  
3 MS. LYONS: Good morning. Today is April 20th, 2023. It's  
4 9:08 a.m. Eastern Time. My name's Sara Lyons, and I'm the  
5 National Transportation Safety Board's Pipeline Operations and  
6 Integrity Management Group Chair for this accident.

7 We're holding this interview at RM Palmer's offices in  
8 Wyomissing, Pennsylvania. This interview is being conducted as  
9 part of the investigation into the explosion that occurred on  
10 March 24th, 2023, in West Reading, Pennsylvania.

11 The NTSB case number for this accident is PLD23LR002. This  
12 interview is being recorded and may be transcribed at a later  
13 date. A copy of the transcript will be provided to you for review  
14 prior to being entered into the public docket.

15 You're permitted to have one other person present during the  
16 interview. This person is of your choice. It can be an attorney,  
17 spouse, supervisor, friend, family member, or no one at all.  
18 Donna, can you state for the record who you've selected?

19 MS. NEWMAN: Corey

20 MS. LYONS: Okay. And for the record, can you state the  
21 spelling of your full name and your job title?

22 MS. NEWMAN: Donna Newman, D-O-N-N-A N-E-W-M-A-N, and I was  
23 the second shift supervisor.

24 MS. LYONS: Now I'd like to go around the room and have each  
25 person state their name with spelling, title, and the agency or

1 organization you're representing. I'm going to begin and then  
2 I'll go around the room, starting with the person on my left.

3 So, my name's Sara Lyons, S-A-R-A L-Y-O-N-S. My title is  
4 Pipeline Accident Investigator, and I'm with the National  
5 Transportation Safety Board.

6 MS. WEST: My name is Kim West. I'm the investigator in  
7 charge. I'm a pipeline investigator with the National  
8 Transportation Safety Board.

9 MR. BAUMAN: Good morning. My name is Gary Bauman. G-A-R-Y  
10 B-A-U-M-A-N. I'm an engineer with the Pipeline and Hazardous  
11 Materials Safety Administration.

12 MS. HARLEY: Good morning. My name is Sheryl Harley. It's  
13 spelled S-H-E-R-Y-L. Last name H-A-R-L-E-Y. And I'm an  
14 investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board.

15 MR. WHITEASH: Good morning. I'm Chris Whiteash, C-H-R-I-S  
16 W-H-I-T-E-A-S-H. I'm an engineer for the Pennsylvania Public  
17 Utility Commission, Gas Safety.

18 MR. SMITH: Logan Smith. L-O-G-A-N S-M-I-T-H. I'm Palmer  
19 Representative, VP Operations, and I'm the party coordinator.

20 MR. WRIGHT: Corey Wright, C-O-R-E-Y W-R-I-G-H-T with the  
21 firm of Wilson Elser here representing the witness.

22 INTERVIEW OF DONNA NEWMAN

23 BY MS. LYONS:

24 Q. So, with that we'll get started with the interview. Donna,  
25 can you give us some background information on your education and

1 experience that led you to the position that you have with Palmer  
2 and your experience in that position?

3 A. I started with the RM Palmer Company in 1990. I started over  
4 in Building 3 as a packer. Then I was in charge of -- they put me  
5 in charge of all the bagging over there. Then I moved to Building  
6 1 first shift. And I tied ribbons in the ribbon department --  
7 started tying ribbons in the ribbon department, and then I went to  
8 lead in Building 1.

9 From there, 2004, I moved down to exiter (ph.) in Building 6,  
10 and I was an assistant supervisor of special hand packing. Then I  
11 was promoted back to Building 1, 2016, I believe. Yeah, 2016, and  
12 I've been there since as the second shift supervisor.

13 Q. Okay, great. Thank you. So, on the day of the accident, can  
14 you describe your -- just from a high level, your overall workday?  
15 What time did you get to work? What did you do that day? And not  
16 really going into much detail about, you know, when you found out  
17 there was some kind of issue going on before the accident. We'll  
18 go into that next. But just overall, your workday, your plans for  
19 that day.

20 A. Okay. I punch in at 2:23 on Friday, March 24th. After I  
21 punch in, I go upstairs and take my temperature. Then I go up to  
22 the third floor into the office to start my shift, which is  
23 getting call offs to see who's not there today and making the  
24 lineup. We had lineups with everybody on the lineup and also with  
25 people that were out.

1 From then, my leads come in and they get their lineups. I  
2 tell them, you know, what's going on for the day and we start our  
3 day. I also do my checks, which include after the shift gets  
4 started, I go to each floor, and I check for quality of the  
5 product, code dates, maybe any messes that the last shift left  
6 that we need to clean up. And also, if something needs to be  
7 fixed at maintenance --

8 4:00 -- so I did, I did all my checks. I went to -- I  
9 started on the third floor, which that's where my office is. And  
10 then I went up to the fourth floor. And then I came back down to  
11 the front of Building 1, which is on 2nd Avenue, 77 2nd Avenue.  
12 And I walked across the alley to Building 2. And I went in that  
13 day, though, we were shut down, we were cleaning. So, I wanted to  
14 make sure that my people knew what they were doing.

15 I left there probably 20 after 3:00, and then I went down to  
16 the basement to line eight to make sure everything was good there.  
17 And then I went back up the elevator and back to my office.

18 Q. Okay. All right, So, I have a picture. I just -- I'm not  
19 sure where -- I'm not that familiar with the buildings. I know  
20 you are. So, in this first picture, and maybe it doesn't show  
21 that well, but my understanding is this is Building 1, on the  
22 picture on the right. This is Building 2. And then if you look  
23 at it from above, this being Building 1, 2nd Avenue here and  
24 Building 2 here. So, about where is your office?

25 A. My office is in Building 1 on the third floor.

1 Q. Okay. And about -- is it near 2nd Avenue? Is it near  
2 Franklin or Cherry?

3 A. It is near Franklin.

4 Q. Could you point about where? So, this is Franklin. This is  
5 2nd.

6 A. Trying to see. So, is this the door? So, if you would go in  
7 on Franklin in the employee entrance and go up the stairs to the  
8 third floor, there's a door and you open it, and my office is  
9 right there.

10 Q. Okay. So, it's pretty like in this kind of vicinity?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Okay. So, I'm just going to write it in here. Third floor,  
13 approximate location. I know it's not exact. I don't have the  
14 floorplan with us today. Okay. So, during the day you were going  
15 between your office -- you described going into the basement where  
16 there is line -- is that in Building 1? Also?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Okay. And then you also had staff in Building 2. So, you  
19 went over there and that was on the first floor of Building 2?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Okay. Okay, great. Thank you. Appreciate that. Okay. So,  
22 on the day of the accident, can you describe, starting from  
23 whenever the -- your first indication that something was unusual  
24 all the way through to the point of the accident, with as much  
25 detail as you can remember? If you saw something or heard



1 something, if you smelled anything, if you were thinking something  
2 and that led you to take your next action, if you can describe  
3 what you were thinking and why you decided to, you know, do one  
4 thing or another to address it, that would be very helpful for us.

5 A. I did not smell anything. I did not smell any gas on -- when  
6 I did my checks. I smelled nothing.

7 Q. Around what time was that?

8 A. Like 20 after 3:00. Maybe -- no, my shift starts at 3:00.  
9 And my leads go -- I wait a few minutes to make sure because they  
10 will call me if someone didn't show up. And then I began my  
11 checks. And I remember Building 2, it was 20 after 3:00 the last  
12 time I was in that building.

13 Q. So, what was your first indication that something wasn't  
14 normal?

15 A. The explosion.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. I was relieving on the third floor. I always help my leads  
18 relieve and I was on Line 21. So, you have -- it's on the third  
19 floor. Line 21 is facing Franklin. It's on that side. And then  
20 it's Line 21 and then down from it on the elevator side, in that  
21 wall, is the packing line.

22 So, I talked to my lead. I said, do you need help relieving?  
23 And she said, yes, you can, you can relieve Line 21. So, I  
24 relieved them. Two people I relieved at 4:41. So, I was  
25 relieving, sealing (ph.). We were on big footballs, hollow

1 footballs.

2 One of my people on Line 21 said to me, do you smell  
3 something? And I said, no, I don't smell anything, because I did  
4 not. So, the last time I looked at the clock, it was 10 to 5:00.  
5 It was 10 to 5:00. And the next thing I remember is an explosion.  
6 And I looked back at that north wall, and it was like a wave. So,  
7 I yelled, everybody out. You know, I knew something happened  
8 because of the wall and the explosion.

9 So, as we -- my leads are in charge of each of their floors.  
10 So, each lead got their people off the floor and me on the third  
11 floor with another lead. We got them outside. I -- at the bottom  
12 of the stairs, there's a closet. I have the main command walkie  
13 talkie, and I gave one to two of my leads. We also every day  
14 carry a lineup. I carry mine in my pocket and so do my leads.  
15 So, we know -- that's how we accounted for everybody in the  
16 building.

17 I walked. I got outside. I gave my leads (ph.). They  
18 proceeded over to the employee parking lot. It's next to Building  
19 5 because that's -- when we -- when something would happen or we  
20 have a fire drill, that's our command. That's where they go. And  
21 there's signs that say, like Line 8 people here. You know with  
22 the lead, everybody has a spot to stand. And then the leads go  
23 over the list. And I was in contact.

24 But when I got out of the building, right, right at the --  
25 this side down of Building 1 or Franklin Street. So, everyone

1 came out the employee entrance. There was -- I came out of the  
2 building and one of my utility workers was up at the top of the  
3 building, you know, at the corner of Franklin and 2nd Avenue. And  
4 he was waving me up there. When I got to the corner, it was a war  
5 zone. I didn't even know that that building had blew up. That's  
6 it.

7 Q. Okay. Thank you. So -- you okay? Do you want to take a  
8 break?

9 A. No.

10 Q. Okay. So, I understand the Building 2 had gas service to it.  
11 Do you know where the gas came into the building? Like, just for  
12 normal operations, do you think -- do you know where the gas meter  
13 was?

14 A. No.

15 Q. Okay. All right. Are you aware of any natural gas related  
16 issues in the time that you've been at Palmer?

17 A. No.

18 Q. Any evacuations due to natural gas, anything like that?

19 A. No.

20 Q. Okay. Are you aware of any recent construction in either  
21 Buildings 1 or 2?

22 A. No.

23 Q. Okay. Do you know what to do, like had you smelled natural  
24 gas? Do you know what it smells like?

25 A. Yes. Like rotten eggs, kind of.

1 Q. Yeah. And do you know what to do if you smell natural gas in  
2 the building?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. What do you do?

5 A. I would have evacuated my people. We would have got out of  
6 the building.

7 Q. And how do you know that? Like, where'd you get that  
8 information from?

9 A. That's common sense. And me being the supervisor, I would  
10 get my people out. Everybody would be out.

11 Q. Okay. Do you ever have a training with -- in your job? Do  
12 you ever get training related to natural gas?

13 A. No.

14 Q. No? Okay. Do you have other safety training that you do?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. And what does that include?

17 A. We have a Safety Committee. We have someone who checks the  
18 fire extinguishers. We have people operating our utility that  
19 operates the forklifts or the pallet jack, they get training. Let  
20 me think what else. I can't think of anything right now.

21 Q. Do you ever do drills, like fire drills?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. About how often?

24 A. Twice a year.

25 Q. And that's fire drills, right? Are there other types of

1 drills as well, or is it --

2 A. No, it's fire drills.

3 Q. Fire drills. All right. So, let me see. I have a couple  
4 pictures for you. So, this is a picture of someone that works at  
5 Palmer (indiscernible). Do you recognize that person?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Who is that?

8 A. Dasha Lynn (ph.) Torres.

9 Q. Do you know how to spell her name?

10 A. I can write it, but let's see.

11 Q. Do you want to write it? Here.

12 A. Let me see.

13 Q. And Torres, T-O-R-R-E-S?

14 A. T-O-R-R -- yes.

15 Q. All right. Thank you. And similarly, do you recognize the -  
16 - who we believe to be Palmer employees also in these photographs?

17 A. Yes. Elias (ph.), he works in -- worked in Building 2. He  
18 was the assistant line tech. This is Cory Reehl. He cleans the  
19 offices in Building 1 on the second floor.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. I don't know. I can't.

22 Q. You can't see that one that well? I know they're a little  
23 blurry. Okay, so you're not sure about the bottom photo on the  
24 third sheet. Okay. Thank you.

25 MS. LYONS: Okay. Let's see. That's all of the questions I

1 have for right now, so I'll turn it over to Kim.

2 MS. WEST: Thank you.

3 BY MS. WEST:

4 Q. This is Kim. I just have a couple of questions maybe you can  
5 clarify. First of all, I'd just like to say, I know this is  
6 difficult, so thank you for coming in and being willing to talk to  
7 us. You mentioned earlier about (indiscernible) people. So, I  
8 didn't understand -- you know, you're a supervisor, but how is  
9 that structured? You said that you have line techs underneath  
10 you.

11 A. I have leads --

12 Q. Leads.

13 A. -- underneath me. They are on the floor working with their  
14 lines.

15 Q. Okay. So, how many leads do you have?

16 A. I have three.

17 Q. Three leads. Okay. Is that for each shift or --

18 A. My shift.

19 Q. -- for your shift alone? Okay.

20 A. Yes. And I had, I had had one back up. Or two backups. I'm  
21 sorry. I had two back up leads. If one of them were out, then  
22 they could fill in.

23 Q. Okay, so but basically three and then the two back up.

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. For vacations or whatever reason. Okay. That's per shift.

1 And then -- so what do the leads do? I'm still sort of foggy.

2 A. The leads, they come in, get their lineups. I tell them if  
3 there's going to be a change on their line, like a packing change  
4 or you're going to have a changeover today. But they also can go  
5 into the computer and see that. You know, they relieve their  
6 people. They make sure the code dates are correct. All the  
7 supplies that are brought up on the floor are correct. So, we  
8 have quality -- you know, we have papers that they need to check  
9 to make sure the stuff is on the floor. Like I said, they  
10 relieve. So, they basically work under me. They're my eyes and  
11 ears --

12 Q. Of production.

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. I see. So, quality assurance. So, they go out, compare the  
15 information on the line versus what the paperwork says. Do I  
16 understand that correctly?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. So, we -- yes.

20 Q. Okay. And then you mentioned a utility worker.

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. What does that person do?

23 A. He brings -- the lead will give him give him a -- it's like a  
24 run book. And it tells you all the supplies that we need for what  
25 we're working on. So, they -- we have one for each floor and also

1 on the dock, we have a palletizer because most of the work from  
2 the third floor comes down a belt and that person transfers the  
3 cartons to a skid and then they wrap it and tag it and it goes on  
4 the truck. So, they're in charge of supplies. Some help relief.  
5 They -- when we get trucks in from the warehouse with supplies on  
6 it, they unload the trucks and put the inventory away. Put the  
7 stuff away.

8 Q. Okay. One of the things -- you mentioned about the Safety  
9 Committee?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Are you a member of the Safety Committee?

12 A. No.

13 Q. Okay. You know how it works?

14 A. I know they meet the Wednesday at the end of each month. The  
15 last Wednesday of the month. Yes. I know one of my workers was  
16 on that committee, and so she would have a safety paper and she  
17 would go everywhere and do safety checks. She would bring it back  
18 to me, what needed to be corrected. We would get it corrected and  
19 then I would sign off and it went -- then it went to my plant  
20 manager.

21 Q. Who is.

22 A. Sue Halvonik.

23 Q. Now this person was on the Safety Committee, is this your  
24 lead? One of your leads or --

25 A. No.



1 Q. One of the line workers?

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. Okay. Well, she was the line tech for Line 8. But I know  
5 that they have -- the Safety Committee is all three shifts. It  
6 could be a packer; it could be a utility person.

7 Q. Last question. I don't know if it's part of your role to  
8 look at emergency response within the facility. Do you have  
9 emergency plans or in case there's an evacuation or some activity  
10 that people have to act quickly? Was it an emergency manual that  
11 you look at?

12 A. Can you --

13 Q. Yeah, I'm vague here.

14 A. Yeah. I don't understand what you're asking me.

15 Q. So, for example, in your facility, you might have an  
16 emergency response that says, in the case of a fire, a earthquake,  
17 a hurricane, this is what we're going to do. And that book is  
18 kept maybe in each facility. Do you have something like that?

19 A. I don't know.

20 Q. Okay. I think you touched on this earlier, but have you ever  
21 smelled gas before, before this period of time, maybe a month  
22 earlier, sometime earlier?

23 A. No.

24 Q. Okay.

25 MS. WEST: Actually, that was my last question. Thank you.

- 1 BY MR. BAUMAN:
- 2 Q. Hi, I'm Gary.
- 3 A. Hi Gary.
- 4 Q. Your shift started at 3:00, and you supervised both  
5 buildings?
- 6 A. Yes.
- 7 Q. How did you know that they were cleaning the building?
- 8 A. Because I relieve first shift supervisor. So, he passes on  
9 information. The supervisor on first will pass on information to  
10 me. He -- yes.
- 11 Q. And then do you supervisor the cleaning people also?
- 12 A. Yes. You mean --
- 13 Q. And were you over in Building 2 supervising the cleaning  
14 people?
- 15 A. I went over for my -- I did my checks, made sure that they  
16 knew what -- yes, I am their supervisor, but I made sure that they  
17 knew what, you know, what we were cleaning.
- 18 Q. Okay. And that started at shift's time, 3:00?
- 19 A. Mm-hmm. Yes.
- 20 Q. And did you physically go over there and talk with the people  
21 that were cleaning?
- 22 A. Yes.
- 23 Q. And were you on all of the floors in the building?
- 24 A. In which building?
- 25 Q. Building 2.

1 A. When you -- no, I didn't go upstairs where the break room is.  
2 I was -- I went through the door and then to the left is another  
3 door. And that's where the belts are that they were cleaning.

4 Q. Okay. You have to excuse me. I don't know the layout of the  
5 building and whatnot, but I do know that the utilities are in the  
6 basement. Would that be an area that you went?

7 A. Utility is not in the basement.

8 Q. Oh, where are utilities?

9 A. In Building 2. In Building 2?

10 Q. Right.

11 A. Building 2 utility is also the backup -- he's the assistant  
12 line tech. So, it's --

13 MS. LYONS: Donna, I think there's confusion. Gary's talking  
14 about the gas utility not the individual.

15 BY MR. BAUMAN:

16 Q. Gas utilities, electric utilities, water utilities is what  
17 I'm interested in.

18 A. Can you -- okay, could you repeat that to me again?

19 Q. Okay. It's my understanding that the natural gas came into  
20 the basement. The electricity came into the basement. The water  
21 and sewer came into the basement. And were folks in the basement  
22 cleaning?

23 A. No.

24 Q. So, where were the folks cleaning?

25 A. Building 2.

1 Q. Okay. And what part of the Building 2?

2 A. On the first floor.

3 Q. On the first floor. And you were in the first floor?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. And then when you were in the first floor, did you hear  
6 anything, smell anything, identify anything, have any complaints  
7 from the people working there?

8 A. No. They said it was a normal Friday.

9 Q. Okay. That's important information. If you think about  
10 anything more in regards to being in that building before the  
11 explosion, please let me know.

12 BY MS. HARLEY:

13 Q. Sheryl Harley again. Thank you, Donna. So, I'm going to ask  
14 you some specific questions here. And any time you need to stop,  
15 please let me know. Okay? So, you said originally that you were  
16 doing your checks and your checks would also include Building 2,  
17 is that correct?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. Would it include where the chocolate tanks were stored in the  
20 basement?

21 A. No.

22 Q. No. Okay. Have you ever been in the basement of Building 2?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Generally speaking, how do you get to the basement of  
25 Building 2?

1 A. It's between Building 1 -- there's an alley. So, you come  
2 out of Building 1, you have to walk down the alley -- or Building  
3 2, you walk down the alley and there is a door to get into there.

4 Q. So, once you go through that door, where does that -- and you  
5 go into Building 2 and you're into the basement -- where does that  
6 door lead you? Are you looking directly at where those chocolate  
7 tanks are, or do you have to go through another door?

8 A. It's like a ramp. You go down the ramp. There's a door to  
9 the left. There's two tanks there. And then in the back -- it's  
10 not directly in front of you.

11 Q. Okay. Is there any kind of access or any kind of hatch that  
12 gives you access to the basement from the first floor where the  
13 product line is?

14 A. In Building 2?

15 Q. In Building 2.

16 A. No, you have to go in that door.

17 Q. Okay. All right. So, I'm going to ask you, if you don't  
18 mind, to identify a few people for me. Okay?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Who was the lead in Building 2?

21 A. Ziamara (ph.).

22 Q. Ziamara? Okay. Is it correct to say that how your chain of  
23 command works is that if there was a problem, Ziamara would notify  
24 you, and then you would notify Sue Halvonik, your plant manager.  
25 Is that how it works?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Okay. All right. You also identified Dasha Lynn -- I'm  
3 going to pronounce that wrong -- Torres. Does she work in  
4 Building 2?

5 A. No.

6 Q. No. Do you know what her title is?

7 A. She's a packer.

8 Q. So, she's a packer in Building 1?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. But that doesn't mean she doesn't work -- she would go over  
12 to Building 2, you know, if somebody was out, she would fill in  
13 and operate the foilers.

14 Q. So, on that day, would there be any reason for her to be in  
15 Building 2?

16 A. Her sister works over there.

17 Q. On second shift?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. And her sister's name?

20 A. Ziamara (ph.).

21 Q. Ziamara. Okay. When you were in Building 2 during your  
22 checks and you were on the first floor, can you identify the names  
23 of the employees that were there?

24 A. Yes. Ziamara, Elias, Domingo (ph.), Judith (ph.), Zorki  
25 (ph.), Diana (ph.). Is that seven?

- 1 Q. Was Patricia (ph.) there?
- 2 A. Patricia. I'm sorry. That's who I was missing. Yes.
- 3 Q. Not a problem. I understand. Okay.
- 4 A. It was seven.
- 5 Q. Okay. And to be clear, all of these workers were involved in  
6 cleaning on that first floor?
- 7 A. Yes.
- 8 Q. Okay. If there was a problem in Building 2, the workers  
9 would go first to their lead, which would be Ziamara?
- 10 A. Yes.
- 11 Q. Ziamara would then do what with the information?
- 12 A. She would call me or call the plant manager.
- 13 Q. Okay. So, would it be possible that Ziamara would not have  
14 notified you that there was a problem and instead would have gone  
15 straight to Sue Halvonik?
- 16 A. I have no idea.
- 17 Q. Is that typical?
- 18 A. Yeah.
- 19 Q. Did you have a chance to talk to Amy Sandoe that day?
- 20 A. Yes.
- 21 Q. Okay. And to be -- and just to make sure that I'm clear, Amy  
22 actually works in the H.R. Department. Is that correct?
- 23 A. Yes.
- 24 Q. Okay. When did you speak to Amy?
- 25 A. She called me. I was -- I believe it was like 3:00 asking to

1 speak to Sue. So, my boss was in the office with me, and I told  
2 her to call the phone beside of me so she could speak to her.

3 Q. At that time, were you aware that there was any issue and was  
4 there a problem?

5 A. When my boss hung up with Amy, she said to me that Diana La  
6 Cruz came in that day to H.R. and said to Amy that she's depressed  
7 and needs help. And I guess -- and Sue told me that that was her  
8 third unreported because Diana wasn't showing up for work. And  
9 they -- Sue told me that the conversation with Amy was --

10 Q. In other words, it is about something personal. It wasn't  
11 about any problem in Building 2, is what I was looking for.

12 A. Correct.

13 Q. Okay, good enough. I didn't mean to get into anybody's  
14 personal business.

15 A. I'm sorry.

16 Q. No, I didn't make that clear. Okay. Did -- at any time did  
17 you see Cory Reehls?

18 A. No.

19 Q. And just for the record, what is the title of Domingo Cruz?

20 A. He runs the foilers and a defoiler over there. He works in  
21 that building.

22 Q. And so, when the cleaning process is going on, you turn off  
23 the heaters and those heaters turn off on both floors. Those gas  
24 -- the gas heaters that keep the chocolate, I guess, liquid. Is  
25 that correct?



1 A. I don't know.

2 Q. No? Okay. So, that day you didn't receive any information  
3 that there was a problem with Building 2 from any employee from  
4 Palmer?

5 A. No.

6 Q. Okay.

7 MS. HARLEY: And I'm done. Thank you. Thank you, Donna.

8 BY MR. WHITEASH:

9 Q. Hi, Donna. I'm Chris again. Just a few clarifying  
10 questions. On cleaning day, does that mean everything is shut  
11 down in Building 2 for the most part and they're cleaning the  
12 lines, or just specific ones?

13 A. There's only one line in Building 2. We were in changeover.

14 Q. When they clean it, is that like a manual cleaning?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Like they use --

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. No steam or anything like that?

19 A. No. Soap and water.

20 Q. Line 21, that's -- you said that's in Building 1, right?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Third floor. Is that near the north wall?

23 A. No.

24 Q. Is that where you were when the building exploded, where you  
25 seen the north wall?

1 A. The packing line was closer to the north wall. It's the  
2 packing line, and then above the packing line is Line 21. That's  
3 where I was relieving.

4 Q. And you can see the north wall from there?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. I see. Is that in the middle of the building, roughly?

7 A. No. Well, what? Line 21?

8 Q. Where you could see the north wall and Line 21.

9 A. What I seen with the wall was the north wall. I was the  
10 furthest away from it. I was on the Franklin side. Franklin  
11 Street side. But when I heard an explosion, I turned to, you  
12 know, to see what that, you know, happened. And I saw the wall  
13 waving. It was like a wave.

14 Q. Okay. I wasn't sure if you could see it from the other side.  
15 Thank you for clarifying that. I guess one of the first things  
16 you mentioned was you check to see what kind of maintenance is  
17 being performed when you come onto shift. Is that right?

18 A. Well, they -- the first shift supervisor will pass on if  
19 maintenance is, you know, doing something like the communication  
20 we communicate and then the next shift that comes on takes over  
21 from there.

22 Q. Was any maintenance communicated to you that day?

23 A. No.

24 Q. Okay.

25 MR. WHITEASH: I think that's all I have right now.

1 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

2 Q. Donna, who's responsible for the chocolate -- actual  
3 chocolate tanks, on your shift?

4 A. The chocolate unloader.

5 Q. And throughout your shift, do you communicate with him?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. And the majority of his time is spent where?

8 A. If he's not unloading or checking the inches in the tank to  
9 see how much chocolate we have -- he reports on that -- he washes  
10 molds, which is in the washroom basement or -- and he also helps  
11 relieve some of the chocolate lines.

12 Q. And when you're looking for policies or procedures, where can  
13 that be located at?

14 A. That is in the S drive and the computer under policies and  
15 procedures.

16 Q. And that's company wide, right?

17 A. Yes.

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That's all I had.

19 BY MS. LYONS:

20 Q. Okay. To continue?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Okay. So, when you went from Building 1 to Building 2 to do  
23 your checks, did you exit the front door -- this door here of  
24 Building 1 that's in the first photograph and enter in this door  
25 of Building 2?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Okay. And is that -- when you returned, is that the same  
3 path that you used?

4 A. Mm-hmm. Yes.

5 Q. Okay. So earlier, I asked you if you knew where the gas  
6 service meter was. Now, I'll just tell you. So, the meter was in  
7 this area here on the side of Building 2. And this is a  
8 photograph of it. We'll call that Number 4. Does that look  
9 familiar to you? Do you remember seeing this?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Have you ever seen anyone working or doing anything around  
12 this meter location?

13 A. No.

14 Q. Okay. So, on the day of the accident, you didn't, you didn't  
15 notice anything in the area that was unusual. You didn't notice  
16 anyone working on the meter, doing anything in that area?

17 A. No.

18 Q. Okay. Are you aware of any electrical issues at Palmer in  
19 the last few years?

20 A. No.

21 Q. Or any fires?

22 A. No.

23 Q. Okay. And then I think this was touched on earlier, but if  
24 there is a problem that one of your employees has, let's say --  
25 and I didn't quite get the full hierarchy -- so you're the shift

1 supervisor. Under you, on a given shift, there's three leads. Is  
2 that right?

3 A. Yes. And I also have -- one of my leads is my backup  
4 supervisor.

5 Q. And that backup supervisor, is that just in case you're out  
6 sick or something, or is it for other purposes?

7 A. Yes. And also, you know, I -- she's -- I trained her. So,  
8 any -- like, say, one day I took off or, you know, I was out for a  
9 couple of days, she could step right in.

10 Q. Okay. And who's that?

11 A. Saint (ph.).

12 Q. Okay. And then the three leads, what's the structure under  
13 the leads? And they also supervising employees? And who are they  
14 supervising?

15 A. They are leading the people on their floor.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. I already said what they do.

18 Q. Okay, so, like, the people that were in Building 2, they had  
19 a lead. I think you mentioned Ziamara, and she was with them,  
20 leading them while they're doing whatever work activity, cleaning  
21 that day --

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. -- whatever work activity that they were doing. Okay. So,  
24 if one of the employees notices an issue, what do you expect them  
25 to do?

1 A. Let somebody know.

2 Q. Okay. And can you walk me through, like, how that would move  
3 forward to resolving that shift (ph.)?

4 A. We have page phones. They would -- if something -- they  
5 would pick it up and call me. Or they might tell their leads.

6 Q. Okay. And a page phone -- so the employees have -- can you  
7 just describe that. I'm not familiar with that.

8 A. The page phone is -- it's on the wall and it's like a phone  
9 and you pick it up and push the button and talk and then let go of  
10 the button and just listen and the person will pick up and you can  
11 speak to them.

12 Q. Okay. So, it's like a direct line to you or --

13 A. It's the whole building.

14 Q. -- the whole building.

15 A. It goes through both buildings.

16 Q. Oh, okay. So, they'll page a specific individual that they  
17 want to reach. They might page you. They might page Sue.

18 A. Yes. Mm-hmm.

19 Q. Okay. Was there a call like that on the day of the accident?

20 A. No.

21 Q. Okay.

22 MS. LYONS: Okay, that's all my questions. Thank you.

23 BY MS. WEST:

24 Q. I just have one question. So, I was trying to find out more  
25 about something called a Red Book. Are you familiar with that?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. And what is that?

3 A. That is -- it's a book, and it's red. It have like this  
4 year's -- it'll say 2023 on it. Has every day. It's like a  
5 calendar. You know, every day at the top it'll, it'll have like  
6 Monday the 19th. So, that is where if somebody is out, I record  
7 it in the book. If somebody -- if they fill out a vacation day  
8 paper, I also log that in the book. So, when I get to the next  
9 day, it helps me with my lineup of who isn't going to be here,  
10 what they have. And I also enter their time and attendance. So,  
11 that's what it's used for.

12 MS. WEST: Sorry. Excuse me. Sorry, go ahead.

13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I apologize.

14 BY MS. WEST:

15 Q. Is this it? Is this the Red Book?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. Okay. It's not what I had pictured. Okay. So, it's sort of  
18 a daily log.

19 A. The supervisors have --

20 Q. Oh, supervisors log.

21 A. Yes. The Red Book.

22 Q. Okay.

23 MR. SMITH: There's a Red Book we call a Red Book that is a  
24 communication log. And then there's the Red Book Emergency log.

25 MS. WEST: That's the confusion.

1 MR. SMITH: That's the emergency Red Book log. You're  
2 talking about the communication log, the daily log.

3 MS. NEWMAN: Yes.

4 MR. SMITH: They call that a Red Book, too, on the floor.

5 MS. NEWMAN: Oh, I'm sorry.

6 MS. WEST: Oh, this is more of a log of who's there, who's  
7 not there, and kind of what --

8 MS. NEWMAN: Yes.

9 MS. WEST: -- activities for the day, if I understand  
10 correctly.

11 MR. SMITH: Yeah.

12 MS. NEWMAN: Yes.

13 MS. WEST: That's one Red Book. The second one I'm going to  
14 talk about was this other Red Book. I had touched on earlier  
15 about emergency response and -- does it look like that? The other  
16 one. The same one.

17 MS. NEWMAN: No.

18 MR. SMITH: No. That one goes --

19 MS. LYONS: How about -- let's let Donna answer the question  
20 and we'll get any additional information later.

21 BY MS. WEST:

22 Q. Does this look familiar?

23 A. I'm not sure.

24 Q. Okay. Thank you.

25 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:



1 Q. Are there written cleaning procedures?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. And how do you reference those?

4 A. On the computer. It's in the S drive under company forms.  
5 And then there's cleaning. It tells you how to clean.

6 Q. Does it tell you what chemicals to use to clean? What parts  
7 to clean? It goes down the whole --

8 A. Yes. Gives you steps.

9 Q. Are there any flammable fluids used in cleaning?

10 A. No.

11 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Thank you so much.

12 BY MS. HARLEY:

13 Q. Donna, I just have a couple more questions and I'll be done.  
14 When was, when was the last time you saw Sue that day?

15 A. I came in at 3:00. I'd say she was only with me for a few  
16 minutes.

17 Q. Did she tell you that she was going over the Building 2?

18 A. No.

19 Q. Would that be something that she would typically do? Go over  
20 to the Building 2.

21 A. She would be everywhere.

22 MS. HARLEY: Okay. All right. That's all I have. Thank  
23 you.

24 BY MR. WHITEASH:

25 Q. I only have one more, Donna. One more question. The

1 maintenance that's communicated to you on shift turnover, is that  
2 verbal communication or is that part of that book you're talking  
3 about?

4 A. It's verbal.

5 Q. Okay. Thank you so much for everything.

6 MS. LYONS: So, is there anything that we haven't asked you  
7 that might be important?

8 MS. NEWMAN: No.

9 MS. LYONS: Okay. Well, thank you very much for talking with  
10 us. That concludes our interview, and we'll go off the record.

11 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the  
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD


IN THE MATTER OF:           NATURAL GAS BUILDING EXPLOSION AND FIRE  
NEAR WEST READING, PENNSYLVANIA  
ON MARCH 24, 2023  
Interview of Donna Newman

ACCIDENT NO.:               PLD23LR002

PLACE:                       Wyomissing, Pennsylvania

DATE:                         April 20, 2023

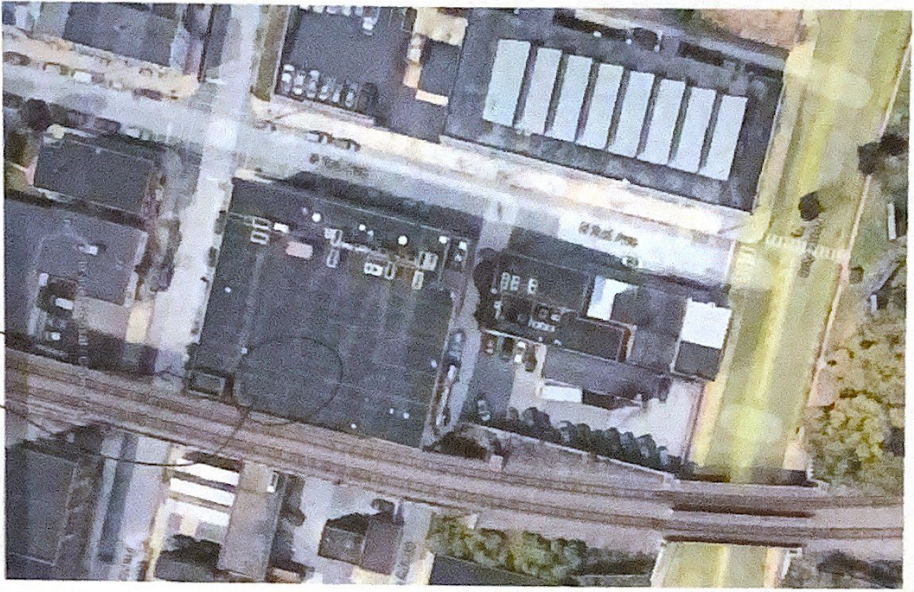
was held according to the record, and that this is the original,  
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed  
to the best of my skill and ability.

  
Melissa Bousquette  
Transcriber

①

PLD23LR002

Donna  
Dezman  
Interviewed



Employee  
entrance

3rd Floor  
Donna's office

Enter  
Bldg 2

Exit  
Bldg 1

2

FLD 23LR002

Donna  
Newman  
Interview



Deichalyne Torres

3

PLD23LR002

Cory Reehl

Donna Newman  
Interview



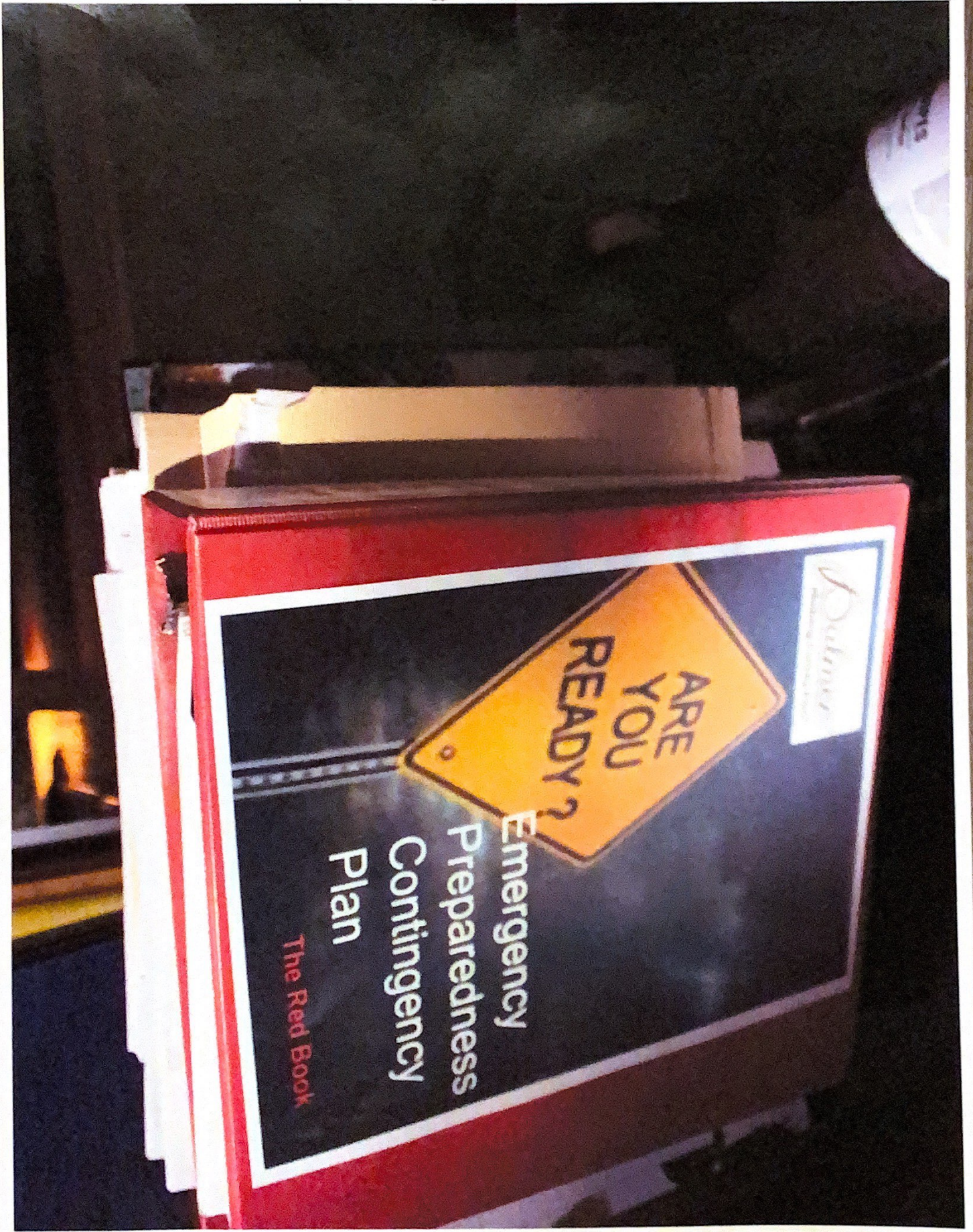
Elias  
Asst. Line  
Tech



(4)



PLD23 LR 002  
Donna  
Newman  
Interviews





Name: DONNA NEWMAN

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Interview: 4/20/2023

I have reviewed my transcript(s) from the above referenced accident and:

- I have no comments to make.
- My comments are submitted herewith.
- My comments are marked on the attached copy.

Signature: 

Page 7, line 7 – call maintenance

Page 19, line 9 – In Buildings 1 & 2

Page 25, line 1 – Heaters stay on

Page 26, line 13 – waving and heard a loud explosion

Page 32, line 17 – No. I did not know about the Emergency Book

Page 34, line 4 – And you can look at the Red Book