

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: \*

\*

DERAILMENT OF UNION PACIFIC \*

RAILROAD TRAIN UEBLTG 20 WITH \* Accident No.: RRD19FR007

SUBSEQUENT FIRE AND HAZARDOUS \*

MATERIALS RELEASE, FORT WORTH, \*

TEXAS, APRIL 24, 2019 \*

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Interview of: MICAH CLUCK  
UP Train Dispatcher

Via Telephone

Thursday,  
April 25, 2019

## APPEARANCES:

RYAN FRIGO, Rail Accident Investigator  
Operations and System Safety  
National Transportation Safety Board

DANIEL MEYER, Safety Inspector  
Operating Practices  
Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

ADAM GIOVANDO, Deputy Regional Administrator  
FRA Region 5  
(Posting)

NOEL IGNACIO, Safety Inspector  
Operating Practices  
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JOHN ALLBERRY, General Director, Operating Practices  
Union Pacific

KAMRON SAUNDERS, National Safety Team  
SMART Transportation Division

STEVE FACKLAN, Safety Task Force  
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen (BLET)

JOHN PROKOP, Safety Task Force  
BLET  
(Posting)

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I N T E R V I E W

1  
2 MR. FRIGO: Okay, we are on the record.

3 My name is Ryan Frigo, and I'm an investigator with the  
4 National Transportation Safety Board. Today is April 25. We are  
5 at the Homewood Suites in south Fort Worth. And this is in  
6 reference to a UP derailment with fire on April 24. The NTSB  
7 accident number is RRD19FR007.

8 And on the phone, we have Mr. Micah Cluck with UP. And at  
9 this time, I'm going to introduce myself and spell my last name  
10 for the transcriptionist. I'm going to go around the room, and  
11 then we'll turn it over to Mr. Cluck to introduce yourself as  
12 well.

13 So Ryan Frigo, F-R-I-G-O, NTSB operations and system safety.

14 MR. SAUNDERS: Kamron Saunders, S-A-U-N-D-E-R-S, SMART TD.

15 MR. FACKLAN: Steve Facklan, F-A-C-K-L-A-N, BLET Safety Task  
16 Force.

17 MR. PROKOP: John Prokop, P-R-O-K-O-P, BLET Safety Task  
18 Force, posting.

19 MR. IGNACIO: Noel Ignacio, I-G-N-A-C-I-O, FRA, posting.

20 MR. GIOVANDO: Adam Giovando, G-I-O-V-A-N-D-O, deputy  
21 regional administrator of Region 5, FRA.

22 MR. ALLBERRY: John Allberry, A-L-L-B-E-R-R-Y, Union Pacific,  
23 operating practices.

24 MR. MEYER: Daniel Meyer, M-E-Y-E-R, FRA, operating  
25 practices.

1 MR. FRIGO: And on the phone, who do we have?

2 MR. CLUCK: This is Micah Cluck, C-L-U-C-K, Union Pacific  
3 train dispatcher.

4 MR. FRIGO: All right, Mr. Cluck. And do we have your  
5 permission to record this conversation with you?

6 MR. CLUCK: Yes.

7 MR. FRIGO: Okay, and do you wish to have a representative  
8 with you here this evening?

9 MR. CLUCK: No.

10 MR. FRIGO: Okay. And is it okay if we go on a first-name  
11 basis?

12 MR. CLUCK: Yes.

13 MR. FRIGO: Okay, Micah, thank you.

14 INTERVIEW OF MICAH CLUCK

15 BY MR. FRIGO:

16 Q. Micah, can you just walk us through your work experience on  
17 the railroad, when you started, and walk us up to your current  
18 position today?

19 A. Sure. I started as a conductor for BNSF out of Lincoln,  
20 Nebraska in 2011, and then took my job as a train dispatcher in  
21 October of 2012. And I've been marked up as a train dispatcher  
22 since 2013 of March. And then since then, I've worked, I believe,  
23 six desks and worked basically out of -- I've been out of Texas  
24 the whole time dispatching.

25 Q. Okay. And Micah, where are you located?

1 A. I'm in Omaha, Nebraska.

2 Q. You're in Omaha. And you said BNSF at first. Are you still  
3 with BNSF or --

4 A. No, no. I only worked there for about a year and then quit  
5 the job to come to UP as a dispatcher.

6 Q. Okay. So that would have been 2012?

7 A. Yes, October -- I guess it'd have been September of 2012 when  
8 I quit that job.

9 Q. Okay, thanks for clearing that up. Any prior railroad  
10 experience?

11 A. No, that was it.

12 Q. Okay. And can you just walk us through when you went on duty  
13 the night of the accident?

14 A. Yeah. It was actually a pretty quiet night. There was not a  
15 whole lot of train traffic. Everything was normal up until the  
16 emergency call I got.

17 Q. And Micah, what time do you start?

18 A. I come on duty at 2220. There was -- I didn't go to a safety  
19 meeting that night. I go on Sundays when they have them. So I  
20 got there -- I think I probably sat down like right around 2218 to  
21 start our safety turnover with the prior dispatcher.

22 Q. And what do you talk about during that safety turnover?

23 A. We talk about, you know, everything. You know, all the  
24 trains that are running, any issues that there might be on the  
25 desk, if there were any weather-related issues or if there's any

1 new speed restrictions or anything about that matter. We speak of  
2 -- that's pretty much it. But we go along the whole line of  
3 railroad just discussing any issues that there might be or if  
4 everything's running normal.

5 Q. And how was everything that night, Micah?

6 A. It was all good. There was nothing going on. There was  
7 actually only one train on the Midlothian sub that night at that  
8 time, and it was already over the spot where the derailment  
9 happened.

10 Q. Did you -- can you recall what time that was?

11 A. The derailment, I believe it was around just after midnight-  
12 30, 12:30.

13 Q. Okay. And I just want to -- I want to just touch on the  
14 weather notifications. You mentioned weather is part of the items  
15 that might be discussed during the safety turnover. What do you  
16 mean by that? Can you elaborate?

17 A. If there's any, if there's any weather restrictions out. So  
18 like we get notifications on anything from high wind warnings,  
19 tornados, flood, flash flood restrictions. And there was a storm  
20 at that time, but then we had no weather issues that were popping  
21 up for any warnings or anything.

22 Q. Okay. And who generates that information for you?

23 A. Truthfully I don't know the programming. We have a program  
24 that runs on our computer, and anytime there is a weather  
25 restriction that pops in there, the program puts it in front of

1 everything on screens and we cannot get out of that screen until  
2 we acknowledge that we've read what we -- that the -- whatever  
3 restriction was. And every night when I do sit down after  
4 turnover, I will click on the screen just to make sure nothing  
5 pops up. And there was absolutely no weather restrictions on at  
6 the time.

7 Q. And Micah, you could see a -- you could -- so you could see  
8 a history, a brief history of --

9 A. I don't get to see the history. I just get to see what's  
10 currently out. So as soon as anything expires, I don't have  
11 access to it anywhere as far as I know. So like, on flash floods,  
12 that's the only touchy one, because if it expires, it goes off of  
13 that screen. So we always print them out as soon as -- pretty  
14 much any restriction, we always print them out so we have them on  
15 the desk in case the computer goes down. But it's extremely  
16 helpful on the flash flood restrictions, because if they're  
17 printed out -- on the computer, if they expire, they go away. But  
18 we need to have them on our desk so that we can keep track of if  
19 it's been inspected so we can cancel the flash flood warning at  
20 that time.

21 Q. And Micah, do you recall any flash flood warnings that were  
22 issued overnight?

23 A. No. There wasn't -- there was one, but it came up -- it came  
24 after. I would say probably 2 hours after the incident happened,  
25 we got a flash flood in that area. But there was no flash flood



1 when I had sat down and -- so it's -- I would have guessed it'd  
2 have been at least 2 o'clock in the morning when we got a flash  
3 flood in that area.

4 Q. Okay. And what about any of the other territory that you  
5 were responsible for dispatching that evening?

6 A. That was the only, the only spot. I believe it was milepost  
7 50 to milepost 46 got a flash flood warning, and that is the only  
8 weather warning I got all night.

9 Q. Okay, Micah. And when you do get that weather warning, what  
10 are you supposed to do with that?

11 A. So on a flash flood warning, I have to tell every train  
12 that's in the area, which there was just that one train. So as  
13 soon as the restriction came up, I issued the restriction into the  
14 system. I called the train, told them -- even though they were  
15 obviously stopped for other reasons, I still had to tell them.  
16 And so I did issue the flash flood warning to them and then  
17 finished my protection in the computer by entering through after I  
18 talked to the trains in the area.

19 And then the only other train that entered that area for that  
20 night was a, just a light-powered, just -- I think it was one or  
21 two engines that came down to start working to try to pull the  
22 cars that weren't derailed back into Fort Worth's yard,  
23 (indiscernible) yard. And I -- that was towards the end of my  
24 shift, but the flash flood warning was still out. I did give it  
25 to them.

1           And I did skip -- we do -- as soon as we issue the warning to  
2 all the trains in the area, I went and talked to the corridor  
3 manager to make sure he was calling somebody to get out there.  
4 And he had called -- I don't know what his first name is. He  
5 called MTM Summers, the manager of maintenance in that area, to  
6 advise him that the flash flood was in the area. He was already  
7 awake due to the derailment and, I believe, already on the way out  
8 there. But that was my process.

9           MR. FRIGO: Okay, Micah, thank you. I don't have any other  
10 questions. I'm going to pass it to my right in the room.

11           MR. SAUNDERS: Kamron Saunders. I don't have anything at  
12 this time.

13           MR. FACKLAN: Steve Facklan, BLET. Nothing at the moment.

14           MR. ALLBERRY: John Allberry, UP.

15           BY MR. ALLBERRY:

16 Q.       So, Micah, I guess I'd like to know a little bit more about  
17 the -- when the train crew called you, the emergency call came in.  
18 Can you walk us through that? Like the call comes in, and what  
19 happened from there?

20 A.       Much as I can remember. The call came in. They said that  
21 they -- the only thing they said at first was that they were on  
22 fire and that they were a key train. I knew that it was a loaded  
23 ethanol train, but to get the better information, I, you know, I  
24 got -- I verified that it was a loaded ethanol train so I could  
25 pass that on to RMCC so that they could tell the first responders

1 so they knew what they were coming in to. I got their head-end  
2 location and I got their approximate derail location.

3 And then told them I would get a hold of RMCC, to which I had  
4 to get off the line with them, immediately called RMCC, passed all  
5 that information on to them. I think it was -- her first name was  
6 Janie (ph.). I don't remember what her last name is. She took  
7 all my information. I did have the -- I had the area protected,  
8 so I went and talked to the corridor, which -- the corridor for  
9 that area wasn't listening, but the Austin corridor, which is  
10 my -- the corridor manager I work with the most, he was listening  
11 and already passing that information on to the Fort Worth  
12 corridor.

13 I then came back, and I had a phone call going off, I  
14 believe. And I thought it was going to be them because they said  
15 they were going to cut away from their train. When I answered the  
16 phone, it wasn't them, so after I got off of that phone call, I  
17 called them back to, you know, make sure they got away from their  
18 train okay, and get a better milepost location because they were  
19 in a really high-stress situation. I figured it could have been,  
20 you know, easy to miss a milepost. So when I verified their  
21 milepost location, they ended up being a mile off. Because I  
22 believe they told me they were at like 49.75 or .25, and they were  
23 really at 48.25.

24 So then I called RMCC back and updated them with that  
25 information so we could get the fire trucks going to the right

1 spot. Then from there, it was just, you know, working with  
2 corridor managers and the director and the train crew to get as  
3 much information as we needed back out to RMCC and to the -- to  
4 everybody else, the managers that had to go out on-scene.

5 MR. ALLBERRY: Okay. I don't have anything else, Micah.

6 MR. CLUCK: Okay.

7 MR. MEYER: Hi, Micah. Daniel Meyer, FRA. Couple questions  
8 for you here.

9 BY MR. MEYER:

10 Q. You said you work six desks. What does that mean?

11 A. So the territory that I'm -- that I was working that night,  
12 it's, you know, one desk. So it has the Midlothian, Corsicana,  
13 Ennis, Athens and Bryan subdivisions on it. That is a desk I own  
14 now, so that's the only desk that I typically work. I'm currently  
15 marked up to three other desks, which means there's three other  
16 territories that I can work if they need me to. But in the total,  
17 the total time I've worked there, I've been marked up to six  
18 desks, I believe. But pretty much I -- 99% of the time, this is  
19 the only territory I work now. I've owned it for, I'd say, going  
20 on 2½ years. This is the only desk I've been working primarily.

21 Q. All right. Do you remember if you or somebody else issued  
22 that train that derailed their track warrant -- or their  
23 bulletins, their restrictions?

24 A. It would have -- yeah, it's hard for me to remember. I  
25 believe that train was already on duty when I showed up, or close

1 to it. So it usually, we usually issue their -- we're prompted to  
2 give them their bulletins an hour before they come on duty. And I  
3 can't tell you exactly the time they came on duty, but if they  
4 were already out and running by 12:30, I'm pretty -- I can almost  
5 guarantee that it was -- you know, they came on duty before 11:30,  
6 which means that most likely it was the previous dispatcher on my  
7 desk that gave them their bulletins.

8 Q. Okay. And you said you have a turnover process with your --  
9 every night, that you go in to talk about any issues?

10 A. Um-hum.

11 Q. Again, did you discuss any weather issues or any unusual --  
12 anything unusual during that turnover?

13 A. No. Really, weather did not even come up in the turnover.  
14 It wasn't until the dispatcher next to me -- because usually in  
15 front of my desk, we have a radar map on the big screens in front  
16 of my desk. And there -- for whatever reason, it was down that  
17 night or else I would have seen it. But like, it's literally only  
18 like 10 feet away from me. They have another radar map that's  
19 just something I don't look at on that side. And the dispatcher  
20 next to me noticed that there was a big storm in the area, so  
21 that's -- and I had only been sitting down for probably 15 minutes  
22 before I realized there was a storm in the area, but I don't  
23 believe weather came up in that turnover at all.

24 Q. All right. And you said that if you have, like, a flash  
25 flood warning out, do you have to have a track inspector go

1 inspect that track before you can lift that restriction or take it  
2 away?

3 A. Correct. So we can still take trains over it. We just have  
4 to give them their flash flood restrictions, which makes them have  
5 to be prepared to stop at every bridge and culvert, and be on the  
6 lookout for any washouts and stuff like that. So even -- you  
7 know, we put the flash flood restriction out. Even if it expires,  
8 if it has not been inspected or if the qualified inspector has not  
9 said that we can lift it, we can't lift it.

10 So it doesn't technically need to be inspected, but the  
11 inspector has to clear it. So if it's a spot that he knows that  
12 doesn't have any chance of a washout, or if he had been out there  
13 an hour prior and then we got another flash flood restriction, he  
14 can, you know, from his house say that we can lift it when it  
15 expires. But almost always they go out there and check it out  
16 until we can lift it.

17 Q. Were you aware of any inspectors out in that area that night?

18 A. Not at the time. You know, over nights I'm -- I usually  
19 never have to talk to the inspectors and MTMs until something  
20 happens. But I don't believe they were in the area for the --  
21 until, you know, the derailment happened. So that was probably  
22 one of the only flash flood restrictions I've ever put out that  
23 when we called the MTM he was already on the way out there, but it  
24 was because of the derailment.

25 Q. Okay. All right. Thanks, Micah.

1 MR. MEYER: That's all I got.

2 MR. CLUCK: Yes, sir.

3 MR. FRIGO: Okay. I don't have any further questions, but  
4 we're going to go around one more time here.

5 MR. CLUCK: Okay.

6 MR. SAUNDERS: Kamron Saunders. No questions. But I do want  
7 to say thank you for circling back and checking on that crew, and  
8 for your work in making sure they got some help out there.

9 MR. CLUCK: Sure.

10 MR. FACKLAN: Steve Facklan, BLET Safety Task Force. Just a  
11 couple of follow-ups here.

12 BY MR. FACKLAN:

13 Q. You've been working this desk with -- that includes  
14 Midlothian sub approximately more or less about 2½ years; was that  
15 correct?

16 A. Yes, sir.

17 Q. Okay. In this area of the derailment, is -- do you know if  
18 it is listed as a critical area for flash flooding?

19 A. No. As far as I know, there's no spots on my territory that  
20 are like a critical, common, washed-out area. The whole territory  
21 -- I mean, during the spring and summer, it can get really bad out  
22 there. But as far as I know, there's nowhere on my desk that is  
23 considered a higher risk area than others.

24 Q. Okay. In this area where the derailment occurred, are you  
25 familiar with -- has it -- there been any past problems, flooding

1 that you know of?

2 A. So it was about a week ago, like week and a couple days -- it  
3 was a Wednesday of last week, we did get at that same exact lake  
4 -- Echo Lake did overflow. I had a train go over the area and  
5 said the water was up to the rail and they could see water gushing  
6 under the rail. And so we -- I put a dispatcher on that, which  
7 makes it so I can't put any other trains through the area. I'm  
8 not allowed to take track out of service, but it's basically  
9 taking the track out of service because we won't put anything in  
10 there except for maintenance.

11 We called the track inspector to come out. He also called  
12 his MTM to come look at it. When they got to the location, they  
13 said that there was -- I don't -- they didn't seem like they were  
14 out there too long as far as the track inspector. He said he  
15 didn't see any issues with it. But then the MTM came out there;  
16 he was only like 10 minutes away at that time. And I think they  
17 then looked at it for about 20 minutes and said that there wasn't  
18 any issues at that location. I believe it was milepost 49-dot-  
19 something. But that was Wednesday of last week. I don't really  
20 exactly remember the milepost, but it was that same lake that had  
21 overflowed into that area, and that's the first time I've ever --  
22 I heard of that lake being -- flooding, so --

23 Q. Okay. That's very helpful. Thank you. And just one last  
24 question. Any past maintenance within the last 2 weeks or 3 weeks  
25 in that area? Just maintenance of way work done?



1 A. Not that I know of. Like, I only work third shift, so most  
2 of that kind of stuff is not on my shift. But there's not been  
3 any routine maintenance in that area, so -- and anywhere near the  
4 last 3 weeks that I know of.

5 MR. FACKLAN: Okay. That's all I have. I appreciate it.

6 MR. CLUCK: Yes, sir.

7 MR. ALLBERRY: John Allberry. No further questions. Thank  
8 you for hanging out all day and waiting for a phone call in the  
9 evening when you thought we'd get this done about 9 in the  
10 morning.

11 MR. CLUCK: No problem.

12 MR. MEYER: Daniel Meyer. No further questions.

13 MR. FRIGO: All right, Micah. Do you -- is there anything  
14 that we did not ask you that we should ask you?

15 MR. CLUCK: No, I -- that was all the questions I was kind of  
16 expecting. And, I mean, truthfully, I got a chance this morning  
17 while I was at work to relisten to the tapes, and there was not a  
18 whole bunch other than just talking to the corridor manager that  
19 happened, other than what you guys could hear on the tapes, so --

20 MR. FRIGO: And Micah, is there anybody else that we should  
21 speak to?

22 MR. CLUCK: I imagine -- I heard that the crew was going to  
23 get talked to, but other than that, I think -- I'd imagine that's  
24 all I could think of.

25 MR. FRIGO: Okay, great. Micah, thank you.

1           And with that, we're going to go off the record.

2           (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:            DERAILMENT OF UNION PACIFIC  
RAILROAD TRAIN UEBLTG 20 WITH  
SUBSEQUENT FIRE AND HAZARDOUS  
MATERIALS RELEASE, FORT WORTH,  
TEXAS, APRIL 24, 2019  
Interview of Micah Cluck

ACCIDENT NO.:                RRD19FR007

PLACE:                        Via Telephone

DATE:                         April 25, 2019

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.

  
Eileen Gonzalez // //  
Transcriber