

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

* * * * *

Investigation of: *

*

WATCO EMPLOYEE FATALITY *

IN HOUSTON, TEXAS, *

Accident No.: RRD22LR002

ON OCTOBER 29, 2021 *

*

* * * * *

Interview of: GARY RADELSKI, Locomotive Engineer
WATCO Companies LLC

Houston, Texas

Sunday,
October 31, 2021

APPEARANCES:

ZACH ZAGATA, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

ANNE GARCIA, Human Performance and Systems Safety Chair
National Transportation Safety Board

CURTIS DOUGHERTY, Operating Practices Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration

DAMIEN CANTRELL, Assistant Vice President of Operations
WATCO Companies LLC

BRENT SHIELDS, Assistant Vice President of Safety
WATCO Companies LLC

KEN TRIBUCH
(On behalf of Gary Radelski)

I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of Gary Radelski:

By Mr. Zagata

5

By Ms. Garcia

7

I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. ZAGATA: Good afternoon. My name is Zach Zagata and I am
3 the NTSB IIC for this accident. We are conducting an interview on
4 October 31st, 2021 with Gary Radelski, who works for WATCO.

5 This interview is in conjunction with NTSB's investigation of
6 the accident near Houston, Texas. The NTSB accident reference
7 number is RRD22LR002. The purpose of this investigation is to
8 increase safety, and not to assign fault, blame, or liability.

9 Before we begin our interview and questions, let's go around
10 and introduce ourselves. Please spell your last name and your
11 title. I'll start off and then pass it to my right.

12 Again, my name is Zach, Z-A-C-H, Zagata, Z-A-G-A-T-A, and I
13 am the NTSB Investigator in Charge.

14 MR. TRIBUCH: Ken Tribuch, T-R-I-B-U-C-H, for the witness.

15 MR. RADELSKI: Gary Radelski, R-A-D-E-L-S-K-I. Locomotive
16 Engineer with WATCO (indiscernible).

17 MS. GARCIA: Anne Garcia, G-A-R-C-I-A, psychologist. I'm the
18 Human Performance and Systems Safety Group Chair for this
19 investigation for the NTSB.

20 MR. DOUGHERTY: Curtis Dougherty, D-O-U-G-H-E-R-T-Y, OPS
21 Inspector, FRA.

22 MR. CANTRELL: Damien Cantrell, C-A-N-T-R-E-L-L, the
23 Assistant Vice President of rail operations at Greens Port.

24 MR. SHIELDS: Brent Shields, S-H-I-E-L-D-S, vice president of
25 safety, WATCO.

1 MR. ZAGATA: Okay, thank you.

2 Do we have your permission to record our conversation with
3 you today?

4 MR. RADELSKI: Yes, sir.

5 MR. ZAGATA: Thank you. Do you understand the transcript is
6 going to be part of the public docket, and as such, we cannot
7 guarantee any confidentiality?

8 MR. RADELSKI: Yes, sir.

9 MR. ZAGATA: Thank you.

10 INTERVIEW OF GARY RADELSKI

11 BY MR. ZAGATA:

12 Q. All right, Gary. To start off with, if you could give us an
13 overview of your railroad career?

14 A. Yes, sir. I started with Union Pacific Railroad in 2010. I
15 started off as a conductor. In 2012, I started my locomotive --
16 started training as an engineer as a fireman, and became full-time
17 in 2013 as an engineer. And I've been riding ever since.

18 I worked for Union Pacific from 2010 through last year, 2019,
19 January. And that's when I left Union Pacific and I moved to
20 Houston, and I worked for a company called Trans-Global Solutions
21 for a year. And I got hired with WATCO this year in April.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. I've been a locomotive engineer riding since -- February of
24 2012 is when I started doing my training.

25 Q. Okay. And when did you mark up as an engineer?

1 A. With UP, it was -- I want to say January or February of 2013
2 is when I actually started riding by myself.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. I've been riding ever since then.

5 Q. Okay. Appreciate it. If you could give us an overview of
6 your day, starting from when you went on duty and up through the
7 accident?

8 A. It was just a normal day. We came in. I met with Matt. He
9 was here at the office. Chris came a little bit later. We had
10 already started our work when he had shown up, and came out and
11 started helping with Matt to direct. And we were working in the
12 west yard at that time. And we were out there for a few hours, at
13 least that I can tell.

14 I think midnight we took our lunch. We came in and took our
15 lunch. It was our first time -- this is a new crew for us. This
16 was the first time we had all worked together. So we had our
17 lunch and we were just kind of talking about how we're going to do
18 things, just getting to know each other. We took our lunch, and
19 then we went out to complete our work. And that's when it all
20 happened.

21 Q. I appreciate it. Have you ever had any close calls at that
22 crossing before?

23 A. No, sir.

24 Q. Okay. Are you aware of anybody having any close calls there?

25 A. No, sir.

1 MR. ZAGATA: Okay. That's all I have for questions right
2 now.

3 I'll pass it to my left, Brent.

4 MR. SHIELDS: No questions from me, sir.

5 MR. CANTRELL: Nothing from me.

6 MR. DOUGHERTY: No questions.

7 MS. GARCIA: This is Ann Garcia.

8 MR. RADELSKI: Yes, ma'am.

9 MS. GARCIA: I have a few questions, and they're pretty much
10 standard questions that we're asking everyone.

11 BY MS. GARCIA:

12 Q. So you work the same as the other two people in your crew --
13 Wednesday through Saturday, 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.?

14 A. Yes. It actually -- I just started the schedule. This
15 Wednesday was my first time working.

16 I was still working nights, but I was coming in at 8:00
17 instead of 6. If -- I was working a different job, that
18 particular contract ran out. So we were a new crew together.

19 Q. Okay. So your previous one was also nights, but what were
20 the hours?

21 A. Well, we came in at 8:00. So basically if we're going to
22 work 12 hours, it'd be 8 to 8.

23 Q. Okay. Do you like working the 12-hour shift?

24 A. Yeah. With Union Pacific, I'm used to working longer hours,
25 so being away from my family so -- yeah.

1 Q. So I just want you to walk me through what your typical day
2 is for your work day, starting from what time you wake up to if
3 you have a meal at home, what time you leave for work -- a few
4 times. So if you want to start with what time you would wake up?

5 A. It depends on what time I get off work. But usually I get
6 off, go home -- let's say I worked 12 hours at the office. So I
7 go home, I take a shower.

8 Sometimes I have breakfast, sometimes I don't. But I'll go
9 right to bed, and I'll sleep maybe three or four hours. I get up
10 and hang out with my family and stuff. And I always try to take
11 at least an hour, hour and a half nap before -- in the afternoon
12 before I come back to work.

13 Q. Okay. So just so I understand a little better so --

14 A. And then I always eat dinner at home before I come to work.

15 Q. Okay. You're off at 6:00 p.m. About how long does it take
16 you to commute home?

17 A. 6:00 a.m.

18 Q. 6:00 a.m.

19 A. But it doesn't take -- I actually live 10 minutes up the
20 road. University of Houston-Downtown is like -- so it's not very
21 far to me. It's one of the (indiscernible).

22 Q. Okay. So you're off at 6 a.m., 10 minute commute to get
23 home?

24 A. If I do work 12 hours, it's -- it'd be a little bit longer
25 because traffic, but yes. It's just up the road, yeah, 15, 20, 30

1 minutes (indiscernible).

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. Like, when this had happened, one of our managers drove me
4 home that day and I took -- it had actually took about 30 minutes
5 because, you know, Houston traffic.

6 Q. Yeah. Okay. So you get home, and then you shower, and then
7 you go to bed? Do you have a meal?

8 A. Sometimes I'll eat breakfast. Sometimes if I was tired, I'll
9 just go right to sleep.

10 Q. Okay. And then you say you get -- about what time would you
11 wake up, then?

12 A. Ten, 11, 12. And I would stay up the rest of the day, try to
13 take a nap before I come in.

14 Q. Do you have another meal before you come in?

15 A. Yeah. I eat dinner before I come in.

16 Q. And you said the nap -- possibly about how long would the nap
17 be?

18 A. I try to take at least an hour, an hour and a half, before I
19 come in. Sometimes in mid-afternoon.

20 Q. Okay. So about what time, roughly?

21 A. I try to get it around 3:00. Little break in the middle
22 there.

23 Q. Yeah. Good. So then, you might eat dinner --

24 A. Yeah. I always eat dinner before I come to work.

25 Q. Okay. And then how long would your commute into work be?

1 A. In work, it's really -- especially when I was at 8:00, it was
2 only 10 minutes, 15, 20 minutes. Not very long.

3 Q. Okay. So say, averaging 15 minutes?

4 A. Yeah. The hardest part is actually coming to the gate at
5 5:00 sometimes. (Indiscernible) in the yard.

6 Q. Okay. Good. That gives me a really good feel. And so on
7 your off days, do you kind of keep the same schedule, or do you
8 shift things around?

9 A. Well, obviously, of course, I'm sleeping in. I'm not --
10 during the day.

11 Q. So what would that be? When would you sleep on your off
12 days?

13 A. Off days? I'm usually up until at least midnight, and then
14 until about 6:00 in the morning.

15 Q. So you go to bed around midnight and then at 6:00?

16 A. I'm -- when I'm not working, I'm a morning person. I like to
17 be up early.

18 Q. Okay. Thank you. That's very helpful.

19 A. Sure.

20 Q. So you mentioned this was the first time that you worked with
21 these two people on your crew.

22 A. Yeah. Our first day working together was on Wednesday, and
23 it was me and Matt and I don't -- Chris wasn't there that day. I
24 don't know why.

25 But -- so me and Matt, and we had another crew on, individual

1 (indiscernible). We worked together on Wednesday. And then --
2 yeah, Wednesday. And then on Thursday we were all together with
3 me and Matt.

4 Q. Had you ever seen them before or talked to them before?

5 A. Yeah. I knew who they were. I hadn't worked with them, but
6 I did know who they were.

7 Q. Okay. And so on this day, would you say that they seemed
8 normal to you? Did they seem --

9 A. Oh, yeah. We were just getting to know each other,
10 getting -- you know, (indiscernible), you know.

11 Q. Yeah. Right. Was there any indication that maybe something
12 was stressing them, or that they were a little tired?

13 A. No.

14 Q. And on this day, how were you feeling?

15 A. (Indiscernible), just a normal day at work.

16 Q. Okay. Did you feel rested --

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. -- or a little tired?

19 A. I felt -- you know, as (indiscernible).

20 Q. Yeah. Okay. Thank you. So for this particular work order,
21 could you just walk us through what your duties and
22 responsibilities were?

23 A. I was the engineer, so I was in the head in the locomotive.
24 So I was operating the train. He was on the end of the train --
25 (indiscernible) so he's basically my eyes and ears on the end of

1 the train, communicating with me, this is how many cars we need to
2 go. And basically, my eyes and ears on the end of the train,
3 what's going on back there.

4 Q. And that communication was on the radio?

5 A. Yes, via radio. Yes, ma'am.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. I had -- we -- when we were under big overpower (ph.), we use
8 our -- because we can't use that radio whenever we have a handheld
9 that we use to communicate.

10 Q. Okay. And you have a lot of experience --

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. -- and he's relatively new. So how would you say that he was
13 handling the communication and the workflow?

14 A. I thought he did very well.

15 Q. Good. And did anything seem out of ordinary?

16 A. Not until it ended. Until that last communication, it
17 wasn't.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. That last communication I had, he said seven cars. And then
20 immediately after that, he said stop. Not something else -- plug
21 it, put in emergency. He just said stop it. It -- something hit
22 (indiscernible), something was very wrong back there, and I put
23 the train into emergency.

24 Q. Okay. And that is what you would normally do? You would
25 just immediately react? You wouldn't stop to ask him why?

1 A. No.

2 Q. You would immediately follow his --

3 A. The way -- his voice, I knew something was wrong. And I
4 immediately stopped.

5 Q. Okay. And then what did you do?

6 A. I called him on the radio immediately. I said, are you okay.
7 And I got no response. And our manager, Andrew, he was monitoring
8 the channels and he called, are you okay? And that's when he
9 called our conductor, Chris, and said go check on him. And that's
10 when everything started to (indiscernible).

11 Q. And did you stay at the front of the train?

12 A. Yes. Stayed in the engine. And once I did, they
13 communicated with (indiscernible), that was right near
14 (indiscernible).

15 Q. Thank you. I can tell it's difficult to talk about.

16 A. It is.

17 Q. And I'm going to tell you just how sorry I am that this
18 happened. With your experience and your familiarity with WATCO,
19 how work is done around here, do you have any suggestions for us
20 about how something might be done differently with WATCO or with
21 the trucks that come and go so that this type of accident doesn't
22 happen again?

23 A. I mean, I really don't know. I wish my -- (indiscernible).

24 Q. Yeah. Well, if you think of something, please reach out to
25 us. Okay?

1 A. Yes, ma'am.

2 MS. GARCIA: And you'll have our contact information. You
3 can reach us directly, if you want. Or you can go through anyone
4 else here.

5 MR. RADELSKI: Yes, ma'am.

6 MS. GARCIA: Okay. We'd appreciate your thoughts. And we
7 appreciate you coming in today.

8 MR. RADELSKI: Yes, ma'am.

9 MS. GARCIA: We know it's hard. But you provided us with
10 information that nobody else knows. And so we really value that.

11 MR. RADELSKI: Yes, ma'am. Thank you.

12 MS. GARCIA: Thank you.

13 MR. ZAGATA: Any additional questions?

14 Do you have any questions for us or anything you'd like to
15 add before we conclude?

16 MR. RADELSKI: No, sir.

17 MR. ZAGATA: Okay. With that, we'll conclude the interview.
18 Thank you.

19 MR. RADELSKI: Thank you.

20 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
21
22
23
24
25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: WATCO EMPLOYEE FATALITY
 IN HOUSTON, TEXAS
 ON OCTOBER 29, 2021
 Interview of Gary Radelski

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD22LR002

PLACE: Houston, Texas

DATE: October 31, 2021

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.



Tahura Turabi
Transcriber