

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: \*

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WATCO EMPLOYEE FATALITY \*

IN HOUSTON, TEXAS, \*

Accident No.: RRD22LR002

ON OCTOBER 29, 2021 \*

\*

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: ANDREW WILLIAMS, Yardmaster  
WATCO Companies LLC

Houston, Texas

Sunday,  
October 31, 2021

APPEARANCES:

ZACH ZAGATA, Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

ANNE GARCIA, Chair, Human Performance and Systems Safety  
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 Andrew Williams)

I N D E X

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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 Andrew Williams, 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 our questions, let's go  
10 around and introduce ourselves. Please spell your last name and  
11 your title. I'll start off and then pass 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, as representative  
15 of the witness.

16 MR. WILLIAMS: Andrew Williams, W-I-L-L-I-A-M-S, yardmaster.

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

20 MR. DOUGHERTY: Curtis Dougherty, D-O-U-G-H-E-R-T-Y,  
21 Operating Practices Inspector for the FRA. Houston, Texas.

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

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 discussion with you  
3 today?

4 MR. WILLIAMS: Yes, sir.

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

8 MR. WILLIAMS: Yes, sir.

9 MR. ZAGATA: Thank you.

10 INTERVIEW OF ANDREW WILLIAMS

11 BY MR. ZAGATA:

12 Q. To start out with, if you could just kind of give us an  
13 overview of your railroad career?

14 A. I've been railroading five years now. I've been a yardman  
15 since about three years and counting.

16 Q. Okay. All right. If you could just kind of give us an  
17 overview of your day on the day of the accident leading up to the  
18 accident?

19 A. I was training two different yardmasters as managers, showing  
20 about -- pretty much my walk out, how we do things, how I do  
21 things on my shift. Teaching them the email process, how I  
22 distribute the work to everybody.

23 So I was doing that with them. During lunch break after the  
24 first half of their day, everybody took lunch. We were talking,  
25 enjoying each other's company. And once they went back out to --

1 fast forward to the incident; they were having trouble shoving  
2 some cars back at the 905 league (ph.), which was the track I was  
3 working on. It was too -- the cars were too heavy with the engine  
4 that they had, so I suggested that they drive up PP (ph.) league,  
5 which was the track ahead of them, and come back by the engine to  
6 finish the move. I think they had like, two and a half hours  
7 left, plenty of time to get the job complete.

8       Once they drove up PP league, the engine died out on them and  
9 they were trying to get that started for about a good 15, 20  
10 minutes. After that, I suggested that they tie the engine down.  
11 They had two BM (ph.) cars in the west yard. We can get on those,  
12 bring it across, and we can finish the move with those.

13       Once they got over there and they coupled up two of the cars,  
14 Matt got on the point to ride the shove back to where they were  
15 going. And once they began shoving, I could hear him shouting,  
16 that'll do, shortly after giving a seven-car count.

17       And the last one was kind of horrific. And I knew it was --  
18 probably something bad happened. So I rush out. I got my truck  
19 and sped to the area. I call for Chris Newton, I assumed he was  
20 the closest person to the scene to get eyes on and I wanted to  
21 make sure he was okay.

22       As I called him, I'm pretty sure I was over the radio long  
23 enough for him probably not to respond. I kept calling for Matt  
24 to get him to respond and know that Oscar (ph.) was alive; injured  
25 is possible, but I wanted to make sure that he was all right. But

1 I knew it was possible that if he jumped off he could've dropped  
2 his radio, so I was looking -- hoping that that was the case.

3       Once I got there, I crossed over the railcars, calling his  
4 name, looking for him. And when I didn't see him on the ground  
5 or -- once I couldn't find him, I went to the rear, and that's  
6 when I saw him. I reached for him to get a response. Didn't get  
7 one. Jesus called 911. I called Travis to notify Travis of what  
8 happened. Yeah.

9 Q. I appreciate. I've just got a few follow-up questions, and  
10 we'll go around some more. Have you ever had anybody turn any  
11 close calls in at that crossing before? Any other crew members?

12 A. Not that I know of.

13 Q. Not that you know of. Okay. Have you ever had anybody turn  
14 in any concerns about the drivers from around there?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Was it just one time or multiple?

17 A. Multiple times. People complain about drivers all across the  
18 park. Some of the drivers actually come complaining to us about  
19 blocking crossings.

20       It's just a frustrating thing to people who're out of the  
21 industry to deal with the trains in that way. We've had multiple  
22 complaints about drivers for sure.

23       MR. ZAGATA: Okay. Appreciate it. I'm going to pass it to  
24 my left, to Brent.

25       BY MR. SHIELDS:

1 Q. When you mentioned complaints from drivers, is that park-wide  
2 or are you considering that to be at that specific crossing?

3 A. No, park-wide.

4 Q. Okay. So do you have any known concerns from that specific  
5 crossing about drivers?

6 A. Repeat it.

7 Q. So you've heard of complaints from drivers. But have you had  
8 any complaints about drivers at that specific crossing at the  
9 (indiscernible)?

10 A. Not that I know of.

11 MR. SHIELDS: He answered the question that I was going to  
12 ask.

13 MR. CANTRELL: I have no questions.

14 MS. GARCIA: Anne Garcia. I have a few questions. Some are  
15 just thinking of things that we always ask -- those kinds of  
16 questions.

17 BY MS. GARCIA:

18 Q. So what is your normal day schedule?

19 A. Mine was Wednesday through Saturday, night shift, 18:00 to  
20 6:00 in the morning.

21 Q. Okay. So on -- this happened early Thursday morning. So you  
22 would've started work Wednesday --

23 A. At 18:00.

24 Q. -- at 18:00.

25 A. Correct.



- 1 Q. Okay. How long have you had this schedule?
- 2 A. I just started this one about three weeks ago. Before that,  
3 I was Sunday through Wednesday.
- 4 Q. Okay. Thank you. And you've worked with this train crew  
5 before?
- 6 A. These guys, yes. Not particularly (indiscernible) but a  
7 combination of engineer, conductor, and brakeman (indiscernible)  
8 the crew. That was the first time all three of them worked  
9 together.
- 10 Q. Okay. But you've worked with each of them separately?
- 11 A. Yes. That's correct.
- 12 Q. Okay. So about how long have you known the engineer?
- 13 A. Gary (ph.) -- about seven months, I'd say.
- 14 Q. And the conductor?
- 15 A. Desmond (ph.) -- I've known him for about six, five months.  
16 I'm not sure when he started.
- 17 Q. Okay. And the brakeman was the other?
- 18 A. I'm thinking about night shift, working with us for about a  
19 month, month-and-a-half.
- 20 Q. And would you normally see these people when they reported  
21 for work?
- 22 A. Yes.
- 23 Q. So about what time was that, that you would've seen them?
- 24 A. 18:00 when I first saw them.
- 25 Q. 18:00?

- 1 A. Yes.
- 2 Q. Okay. That's when you came off?
- 3 A. That's correct.
- 4 Q. Okay. And how do you see them? Do you go out to them? Do  
5 they come to you?
- 6 A. No, we all drop brief in the office. That's where everybody  
7 clocks in and talk -- let them know how work is going to go.
- 8 Q. Okay. But their shift -- okay. So when did their shifts  
9 start? Same as yours?
- 10 A. 18:00.
- 11 Q. Okay. So you're on the same shift -- 18:00 to 6:00 a.m.?
- 12 A. That's correct.
- 13 Q. Wednesday through Saturday?
- 14 A. That's correct.
- 15 Q. Okay. How many other crews do you have?
- 16 A. I have about four different night shifts from four different  
17 crews.
- 18 Q. Four different crews?
- 19 A. That's correct.
- 20 Q. And it's the same people -- engineer, conductor, brakeman?
- 21 A. What's the question?
- 22 Q. It's the same group of people in the crew?
- 23 A. Generally, yes.
- 24 Q. Set positions?
- 25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Okay. On this particular day, then, you saw them -- it was  
2 basically Wednesday night, 18:00, check-in. You said you had a  
3 safety briefing?

4 A. Yes, ma'am.

5 Q. So what's included in that? What did you go over on this  
6 day?

7 A. We typically talk about the work load, hand out the paperwork  
8 to everybody, let everybody take a look at it. Any questions or  
9 concerns, they need any advice on how to make particular moves,  
10 any questions, that's typically what I go over with the guys.

11 Q. Okay. And who is it that has set up the workload for them?

12 A. Throughout the emails, customers ask for requests, and we  
13 have to assist them when there are things that need to be done.  
14 So I guess I set up the work load. Is that what you were asking?

15 Q. Um-hmm.

16 A. So I do.

17 Q. So you do that before they come in for the briefing?

18 A. Yes, yeah. I normally come in at like, 17, just to get there  
19 early to get everything prepared. So I can have a good scope over  
20 everything that needs to be done so I can answer questions better  
21 than the question being asked and I don't know the answer to it  
22 yet.

23 Q. Thank you. So on your workdays, give me an idea as to what  
24 your general schedule is. What time do you go to bed? What time  
25 do you wake up?

- 1 A. I go to bed -- try to go as soon as I get off work, that way  
2 I can wake up -- and now recently, my son -- well, my wife started  
3 working again. But two weeks ago -- so I drop my son off at  
4 school once I get off, so once I get back from dropping him off, I  
5 go to sleep as quickly as I can to get some rest and be back.
- 6 Q. How old is your --
- 7 A. My son is six. I have a two-year-old daughter now.
- 8 Q. And you drop your daughter off, too?
- 9 A. No, she stays home with me.
- 10 Q. Okay. So when you get off work at 6:00 a.m., you go home.  
11 Then you get your son?
- 12 A. Yeah, I drop him off at 7:15 at the earliest. Get  
13 home -- so I guess about 8:00 is a good time I get rest, and I  
14 normally wake up by 1:00, 2:00, depending on when I  
15 (indiscernible).
- 16 Q. Okay. Do you eat before you go to bed? Is that mealtime?
- 17 A. No. I normally eat when I wake up.
- 18 Q. So you get up around 1:00 or 2:00 in the afternoon?
- 19 A. That's correct.
- 20 Q. Okay. And then you'd have breakfast?
- 21 A. Depends on how I feel, but yeah. I don't really have a  
22 pattern on my eating schedule other than lunch for -- at work.
- 23 Q. Okay. What time do you leave for work?
- 24 A. 4:00, I leave to get about 5:00.
- 25 Q. And about how long is your commute?

1 A. 30, 35 minutes.

2 Q. Okay. So you leave 16:00; 30, 35 minutes for the commute --  
3 that allows you time to --

4 A. Yeah, get everything together and job brief with the  
5 yardmaster to pass on information and get a general understanding  
6 of what needs to go on and get accomplished.

7 Q. Okay. And then -- so you have a meal at work. About what  
8 time is that?

9 A. It's not a constant thing or a consistent time. I don't have  
10 a consistent time for when I eat.

11 Q. Okay. Do you bring your meal with you or do you go out?

12 A. Sometimes if I have a meal cooked, I'll bring some food to  
13 work.

14 Q. Okay. Good. And is that the schedule that you keep  
15 Wednesday through Saturday, pretty much?

16 A. All my timings and everything? Pretty much, yeah.

17 Q. Okay. So you said you go to bed about 8:00 a.m. and you get  
18 up about 1:00 or 2:00?

19 A. That is correct.

20 Q. Okay. So that's -- I'm not really good at math, especially  
21 on the fly -- but that looks like five or six hours a night?

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. And then on your off days, do you switch your schedule  
24 around?

25 A. As far as (indiscernible), I try to stay consistent with that

1 so I don't ever get tired. So no, I normally be (indiscernible).

2 Q. Okay. Jogging back a little bit, when you go home from work,  
3 is it about the same length of commute time?

4 A. Depends on the day, I believe. If I leave around 6:00, a  
5 little after 6:00, it's a lot more traffic.

6 Q. So about how long would it take?

7 A. About 45 minutes if I leave at 6:00. Any earlier than that,  
8 no one is on the road -- I get there in about 25 minutes.

9 MS. GARCIA: Okay. Thank you. That's -- I'm going to pass  
10 it on to --

11 MR. ZAGATA: Okay. Anybody else have any additional  
12 questions?

13 MR. TRIBUCH: So after he answers a question, can I ask him  
14 to clarify what he's --

15 MR. ZAGATA: Absolutely. If you could just state your name.

16 MR. TRIBUCH: I think I'm good for now.

17 MR. ZAGATA: Good? Okay.

18 MR. TRIBUCH: I just wanted to clarify for --

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I think he said Wednesday to Thursday  
20 -- I thought the incident happened on a Friday morning.

21 MR. WILLIAMS: Yeah, that's confusing.

22 MR. TRIBUCH: I was --

23 MR. ZAGATA: Okay.

24 MS. GARCIA: It happened Friday morning at 4:00 a.m.?

25 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes, ma'am.

1 MS. GARCIA: Okay. So I walk him back to Thursday? Did I  
2 get that wrong?

3 MR. TRIBUCH: I think so.

4 MS. GARCIA: Okay. I stand corrected.

5 MR. ZAGATA: All right. Do you have any questions for us?  
6 Anything you want to add?

7 MR. WILLIAMS: No, sir.

8 MR. ZAGATA: Okay. Is it all right if we contact you if we  
9 have some additional questions?

10 MR. WILLIAMS: That's fine.

11 MR. ZAGATA: Okay. And once again, we'd like to thank you  
12 for taking the time to help us out with this.

13 MS. GARCIA: I have a couple of questions. Sorry.

14 MR. ZAGATA: Go ahead.

15 BY MS. GARCIA:

16 Q. Just real quickly -- for your shift, you would know about any  
17 trains that come and go through that intersection where the  
18 incident happened?

19 A. Trains? We move all the trains. What's the question again?

20 Q. So what I'm wondering is, for that intersection where the  
21 accident happened, can I get a feel for how often a train is moved  
22 through there? And would you be the one -- when you're on duty --  
23 to be guiding that, to be assigning that work? Or are there other  
24 yardmasters?

25 A. No, there are other yardmasters on my shift. And I can't

1 answer the first question. I have no information on that one.

2 Q. Okay. Do you have a feel for how often -- is it unusual for  
3 a train --

4 A. Yeah, we don't normally work over there unless we're building  
5 that unit train (ph.), but our main thing is to (indiscernible)  
6 customers. We don't have many customers over there and we don't  
7 store cars that move often in that yard. Those are  
8 (indiscernible).

9 Q. Okay. Do you keep a log?

10 A. No.

11 Q. Of all of that -- does the company -- like, your -- the work  
12 that you assign, is that in the computer someplace?

13 A. The paperwork? Once -- I'm not sure. I'm not sure if we can  
14 put it back up or not.

15 MS. GARCIA: Okay.

16 MR. CANTRELL: Cantrell.

17 BY MR. CANTRELL:

18 Q. Andrew, we have an inventory system that we use to document  
19 railcars direct.

20 A. Yes, that's correct.

21 Q. Can you tell us the name of that inventory system?

22 A. WATS (ph.).

23 MR. CANTRELL: Okay. WATS tracks inbound car movements and  
24 outbound car movements as well.

25 MS. GARCIA: Thank you.



1 BY MS. GARCIA:

2 Q. Do you recall any other incident? I know that Zack touched  
3 on this. But any other incidents or people complaining about the  
4 drivers at that particular location?

5 A. No.

6 Q. Okay. If you did, would there be a place where you would log  
7 that information? Or do you pass it on to someone else?

8 A. We have KMI (ph.) where we can put safety suggestions in, and  
9 there are team members that do, as well. Input into the system.

10 MS. GARCIA: Okay. Good. That's all I have.

11 MR. ZAGATA: Okay. Thank you. Any additional questions?

12 MR. CANTRELL: Cantrell. That system you talked about also  
13 allows you to put in  
14 near-misses.

15 MR. WILLIAMS: That is correct.

16 MR. CANTRELL: Okay. Thank you.

17 MR. ZAGATA: Anybody else? All right. Well, with that,  
18 we'll conclude. Thank you.

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

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

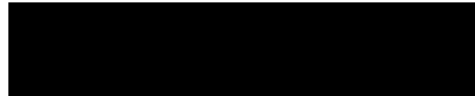
IN THE MATTER OF:           WATCO EMPLOYEE FATALITY  
                                  IN HOUSTON, TEXAS  
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                                  Interview of Andrew Williams

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