UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	*	
	*	
NATURAL GAS BUILDING EXPLOSION &	*	
FIRE NEAR WEST READING,	*	Accident No.: PLD23LR002
PENNSYLVANIA, ON MARCH 24, 2023	*	
	*	

Interview of: JOSEPH PEREZ, Locator
UGI Utilities

West Reading, Pennsylvania

Thursday,
April 27, 2023

APPEARANCES:

SARA LYONS, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

JOHN TOUMEH, Manager, DIMP and Leak Surveying
UGI Utilities

GARY BAUMAN, Engineer
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration

ELENA BOZHKO, Pipeline Safety Engineer
Public Utility Commission

JOSH RUNYAN, Representative
Steptoe & Johnson, LLP

I N D E X

I N T E R V I E W

(3:01 p.m.)

MS. LYONS: Good afternoon. Today is April 27th, 2023. It's now 3:01 p.m. Eastern Time. My name's Sara Lyons, and I'm the National Transportation Safety Board's Pipeline Operations and Integrity Management Group chair for this accident. We're holding the interview at the West Reading Fire Department in West Reading, Pennsylvania, and the interview's being conducted as part of the investigation into the explosion that occurred on March 24th, 2023, in West Reading, Pennsylvania. The NTSB case number for this accident is PLD23LR002.

This interview's being recorded, and may be transcribed at a later date. A copy of the transcript will be provided to you for review prior to being entered in the public docket. You're permitted to have one other person present during the interview. This is a person of your choice. It can be an attorney, spouse, supervisor, friend, family member, or no one at all. Please state for the record who you've selected.

MR. PEREZ: Josh.

MS. LYONS: All right. Okay. For the record, please state the spelling of your full name, and your job title.

MR. PEREZ: Yeah. So my name is Joseph Perez. So it's J-O-S-E-P-H, Perez, P-E-R-E-Z. And my job title at this present time is locator.

MS. LYONS: Okay. Okay. Now, I'd like to go around the room

and have each person state their name, with spelling, title and the agency or organization you're representing. I'll begin, and then I'll go around the room, starting with the person on my right. So my name's Sara Lyons, S-A-R-A, L-Y-O-N-S. I'm a pipeline accident investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board.

MR. TOUMEH: John Toumeh, J-O-H-N T-O-U-M-E-H, and I'm with UGI, and I'm manager of DIMP and leak surveying.

MR. BAUMAN: Hi, I'm Gary Bauman, G-A-R-Y B-A-U-M-A-N. I'm engineer with the Pipeline and Hazardous Material Safety Administration.

MS. BOZHKO: My name is Elena Bozhko. I'm a pipeline safety engineer with the Public Utility Commission.

MS. LYONS: All right.

MS. BOZHKO: E-L-E-N-A, B-O-Z-H-K-O.

MS. LYONS: Josh, can you introduce yourself?

MR. RUNYAN: Josh Runyan, J-O-S-H, R-U-N-Y-A-N, with Steptoe, representative for Joseph Perez.

MS. LYONS: Thanks. So to get started, I'd just like to ask you, Joseph, if you can give us a summary of your background, your education, and experience at UGI, and the responsibilities of your job.

MR. PEREZ: My education -- graduated in '93 from Reading High School. Been working for UGI for approximately about five years now, four to five years. Before UGI, I worked as a

subcontractor for General Asphalt for three years. My title now is -- I'm a locator, facility locator. So I'm out locating facilities every day, on PA-1 call tickets.

INTERVIEW OF JOSEPH PEREZ

BY MS. LYONS:

Q. All right. How long have you been a locator?

A. For going on two years now.

Q. Okay. And before that, what was your position?

A. I was just a helper.

Q. And what's a helper?

A. Just general labor helper. Dump truck driver, you know, hand-digging, anything of that nature, the physical work.

Q. Okay. Perfect. So we're interested in talking about the meter relocation at 17 South 2nd Avenue. And do you remember what your role was in that project?

A. I have very faint memory of that job. It was so long ago. So I can't actually remember what I was -- what my role was that day.

Q. Okay. So I have -- let's see. I have a picture of the area. You may have already -- I'm going to call this Number 1. You may have already looked at some photos in preparation for today. But just to try to remind you of where the work was being done -- so this is Building 1, this is Building 2, at Palmer's facility. And I believe inside of this area of Building 2, in the basement, was a meter that was being relocated to the outside. Does that seem

familiar to you?
A. Very faint. I don't know -- I can't remember the exact scope of work that we were doing there that day. I think -- I think it was running a service out to the meter outside of the building. But I remember slightly.
Q. Okay. Okay. So here's a picture of the same building, so this wall -- there's two pictures here. Let me call this Number 2. This wall is the same as in this first photo. And you can see there's no meter outside. This is the exact same location after the meter was relocated. Is that helping at all? Remember the job? Is that helping you remember the job at all?
A. (No audible response.)
Q. Not really?
A. Very faint. It's --
Q. Very faint?
A. Yeah. It's, it's just been so long ago that I can't really remember the job in detail.
Q. Okay. That's fine. That's understandable. It's been a couple years. So let's talk generically. All right. Here's Number 3. So this is a generic sketch of an inside meter, outside main, the service tee, the service line. All right?
A. Mm-hm.
Q. So if you were going to a job like this, and the task was to relocate the meter outside, around the 2021 timeframe, what would you see as possible roles for you at that time? Like, in your --

were you a laborer, helper, at that time?
A. Yes.
Q. Or were you a locator? So you were a helper?
A. I was a helper, laborer at that time.
Q. So what kind of tasks would you have done in a project like this?
A. It would've varied. I could've been a dump truck driver at the time, or I could've been saw-cutting or just hand-digging. It would've varied. It would've varied, my role on that job.
Q. Okay. Okay. Well, have you done any work with the gas line?
A. Have I done any work with this type of gas line?
Q. When you were a helper, would you have done work on a gas line like --
A. Depends on what my crew leader wanted me to do. If he had a certain task for me to do, then yes, I would do it.
Q. Okay. Would your crew leader -- when you were a helper, would your crew leader have asked you to -- can you give me examples of what a crew leader might ask you to do that involves the gas assets, when you were a helper?
A. Most crew leaders normally would perform all the tasks on the main or on the service, depending on if it's a plastic service or steel service. Normally, the crew leader would perform all the tasks, like fusing the tee onto the main, and air testing it and tapping and stuff like that. So I would -- normally, as a helper, I would, like, you know, provide him with tools, or I would saw-

cut, you know, before we start digging. I'd be hand-digging. That sort of, like, labor work, I would perform.
Q. Okay. Okay. So you wouldn't really be working on the gas assets directly? You would just be supporting the crew leader, typically?
A. It depends on what the crew leader wanted me to do, what task he had. If he wanted me to perform pipe work, then I would perform the pipe work. But if he wanted me just to be a helper, then I'd just be a helper.
Q. Okay. So when you were a helper, were you trained on performing pipe work?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. So what type of pipe work did you perform as a helper?
A. I'm qualified in what UGI trained me to do, which is plastic fusion.
Q. Okay. All right. So in a job like this, might a crew leader have asked you to -- when you were a helper, not now -- to, like, cut the service line, if you -- if you were retiring this service tee, because you're moving the meter outside?
A. Mm-hm.
Q. Might the crew leader have asked you to cut the service line?
A. If everything was performed before that time of cutting the pipe, if he already had stopped the flow of gas going into that service, yeah, he would ask me to cut the pipe, yeah.
Q. He could've?

A. Yeah.
Q. Well, could he have asked you to be the one to stop flow of gas into the pipe?
A. Sure.
Q. Okay. So anything, you could've done?
A. Sure.
MS. LYONS: Okay. Okay. I think I'm going to defer to you at this time.
BY MR. BAUMAN:
Q. You mentioned you were a laborer. So my impression of a laborer is, they dig the hole.
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Do you remember any white powder, white anything, associated with digging the hole?
A. No. No white powder. I mean, nothing of that nature. No.
MR. BAUMAN: Okay. I don't have any additional questions.
BY MS. BOZHKO:
Q. Just in general, do you remember any specifics about the job site that come through after you look at the pictures? Something that happened, something you did, or -- specifically, there? Or --
A. Normally, typically, I remember things that put an impact in my memory. So if there was something that I would've seen that would've imprinted something in my memory, to keep it there, then it would've been there. But it's nothing out of the ordinary of

normal routine work that we do on a daily basis. Nothing out of the ordinary.

Q. Okay. Okay. I thought maybe, because the project's a group of, like, four, you're like, oh, I remember that day, and I know so-and-so, like, had a birthday and because of that, we were like -- I don't know, had lunch right there. I don't know. Just something that would bring memories back. So --

A. No. We do so many of these services on a daily basis that for me to try to remember that job could -- I could actually make up a story that's not true, because we do so many jobs, and they're all similar.

MS. BOZHKO: All right.

BY MS. LYONS:

Q. Okay. So let's see. So I have a picture that is larger than real life. Let me sort of see. So you've done a lot of work. Have you done a lot of work with service tees that look like this one?

A. Not so many.

Q. Have you done some?

A. Actually, no. I never fused on any of them type of tees. I was never qualified for that tee.

Q. Okay. But you fused other types?

A. Yes, like the Centrals and the Phitechs.

Q. Have you ever retired a service tee that looks like this?

A. No.

Q. Have you ever retired any service tee?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. So when you're going through that work, can you describe the process?
A. On a plastic tee?
Q. Mm-hm.
A. Well, we take the cap off, and then we run the tap down to stop the flow of gas going into the service. So once we stop the flow going into the service, then we proceed to cut off the service at a certain length, and then we'll either fuse on an endcap or a stab fitting at the end of it. And then we'll run the tap back up, and then -- to get the gas back into the service, to stop at the end cap, and then we'll soap test it, to make sure that it is not passing or leaking through that fitting.
Q. Okay. So if I just repeat back to you to make sure I understand -- I'm going to use this Sketch Number 3. So you would insert the tap down, to stop the flow of gas at this -- you take off the cap.
A. Right.
Q. Then you'd turn the cap down to stop the flow of gas.
A. We'll run the tap down to stop the flow of gas. Yes.
Q. Okay. And then you'll -- so remove the cap. Then you'll cut the service line. And then you'll cap that with what? Does it depend on the material?
A. It's just -- this picture looks like a steel service tee to

me. So if it's a plastic tee --
Q. It's a plastic in the discussion that we're having.
A. Okay. So then we'll be able to end-cap it, yes.
Q. Okay. So then you'll end-cap. And then you'll do a soap test?
A. Or run the tap back up. And then we'll soap test it to make sure it's not passing.
Q. Okay. Okay. Do you soap test before you replace the cap? Or do you replace the cap and then soap test?
A. Well, we'll soap test it before we run the tap down, and then once we see that there's -- it's not leaking around the main or under the tee -- so then we'll run the tap down and then we'll cap it, and then we'll run the tap up, and then soap test it. So we'll do two soap tests.
Q. Okay. Okay. So the initial soap test, is that before you remove the cap?
A. Yes.
Q. So it's the initial condition, as you find it.
A. The initial -- as soon as we find -- as soon as we expose it, that's the first thing we'll do. We'll soap test it.
Q. Okay. And then you go through the process you just described. You'll replace the cap, and then you'll soap test it again?
A. Correct.
Q. Okay. And that's your retired condition, and you're

confirming, no leaks.
A. Correct.
Q. Okay. Are there any other things that you're looking out for during this activity? Are you inspecting any of the other components?
A. If there's more than one tee in that hole that we're in, that's exposed with the main, if there's more than one tee, yes, we'll check them tees, also. We'll soap them -- soap test them tees. If there's nothing else in the hole just besides the one tee, it'd just be the one tee that we check.
Q. Okay. And how about when you remove the cap? Do you do any visual inspection of the cap?
A. Yeah, we'll take a -- we'll take a look at it, take a look at the threads, make sure they're -- there's a rubber seal underneath it, make sure that that's still there.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah, we'll take a visual look at it, make sure that everything looks normal.
Q. Okay. What things would you look for that might be abnormal?
A. A crack on the cap. Or we'd take a look at the threads, make sure that the threads look like normal, that they're not chewed up or anything of that nature.
Q. Okay. And do you look at the O-ring also? What do you look for with the O-ring?
A. Just -- we look at the O-ring to make sure that it's still

there, and it's pliable and still looks like it's going to hold back gas.

Q. Okay. How do you -- how do you -- like, what do you look for when you look at an O-ring? Like, how do you determine it's pliable or not pliable, by looking?

A. Just -- we tend -- I tend not to remove them off the cap. I tend just to leave them there. But just by a visual -- just by a visual look, to see if there's any cracks or anything in there, anything of that nature.

Q. Oh, like, cracks. Okay.

A. Yes. Correct.

Q. How about the rest of the service tee? Is there anything else you look for?

A. Just -- the soap test will tell us if there's -- if it's passing gas.

Q. Okay. Have you ever been taught to look at -- look, like, inside, where you have the tap? And I think there's another component inside. Have you ever been taught to look for anything with those pieces?

A. They just -- you know, everything visual. Once you run the tap down, there's really not much in there, besides, like, debris or dirt that can get in there. So we're careful about that part of anything falling in once we remove the cap.

Q. Okay. So when you take the cap off, you just want to be really clean in the rest of your work.

A. Right. Correct.
Q. Okay. Okay. When you get trained on retiring service tees, plastic service tees, do they specifically tell you to look for cracks in the cap, to look for O-ring pliability?
A. Again, I can't remember if they tell us that. But that's something I do.
Q. That's what you do.
A. As retiring a tee, yes.
Q. Okay. And then inside, just make sure you keep it clean?
A. Yes, correct.
Q. And that's good?
A. Correct.
Q. And then on the outside of this -- what do you call this part of the tee? Do you have a name for that?
A. No, I don't have -- I don't have a name for that.
Q. Zach was calling it tower, so I'm going to stick with that.
A. Okay.
Q. On the tower of the tee, do you look for anything there?
A. On the outside or in the inside?
Q. Both.
A. Both? On the outside, just look to see if there's any cracks. In the inside, just make sure there's no debris falling inside.
Q. Okay. So how long does it take to do that visual inspection?
A. I don't know. I never timed it.

Q. If you're just -- okay.
A. And I never put a stop --
Q. Does it take a long time? Or is it pretty quick? Like --
A. I'm not saying it takes a long time. I'm not saying it's pretty quick. But I'm just saying it's something that I never timed. So I don't have that information.
Q. Okay. Okay. When you're out on a job like this, are you on a schedule? Or do you just take however long it takes to finish the job?
A. No, you don't have all the time in the world to finish a job, no. So you have to work -- you know, work yourself in a steady pace to get the job done at a certain time. But safety first. So you have to perform your job in a safe manner, in that time limit. So I don't have --
MR. TOUMEH: Sorry.
MR. PEREZ: I don't have that information, to determine, you know, if -- you know, how long it takes to inspect a service tee.
BY MS. LYONS:
Q. Sure. It's okay.
A. I know, it's just pretty much all visual, soap testing and making sure that everything looks how it should look, that there's no defects in it, no dirt in it, or anything of that nature.
Q. Okay. Okay, perfect. So if you find something that isn't acceptable to what you just said -- maybe you find a leak, maybe you find a crack in the cap, maybe you find an O-ring that's not

pliable-appearing -- what do you do?
A. I would tell my crew leader.
Q. Okay. And then he just lets you know?
A. Well, I forward the information to my crew leader, so then he is going to make the call.
Q. Okay.
A. He's going to make the call, what to -- what's the next procedure on, after that.
Q. Okay. And then he'll just direct the work from there?
A. Either he'll direct the work, or he'll do the work himself. It just depends on the situation.
MS. LYONS: Okay. Good. I think that's all the questions I have. Thank you.
MR. PEREZ: Mm-hm.
MS. LYONS: John?
BY MR. TOUMEH:
Q. Would you ever bury a leak?
A. No.
Q. Would you allow someone in your crew to bury a leak?
A. No.
Q. What would you do if they tried to do that?
A. Stop work.
MR. TOUMEH: That's all I have.
BY MR. BAUMAN:
Q. You mentioned the process of winding down the tap to stop the

leak -- or to stop the flow, in order to cut the service line and put a cap on it.

A. Correct.

Q. How do you know how tight to wind down on the tee handle cap wrench?

A. Them tee handles that wind down the tap have a washer that hits a certain depth, and once that washer hits the top of the tee, that's your depth on that tap. So the tee has the indicator on it that tells -- it stops you from -- continue on.

Q. Okay. And then, you've finished capping off the service line. And now you open it back up. How much do you open it back up?

A. All tees are different, depending on the tee. Some just come flush to the top, or some, there's a lip on top of the tee that don't let it -- don't let the tap come all the way up.

Q. Okay. And then how tight do you know to tighten the cap? Or how do you know you've got a cap tight?

A. Once you put the cap on, you snug it. You don't apply a lot of pressure to it. You snug it. And then you soap test it, to see if there's any passing gas. And if there's passing gas, you snug it a little bit tighter, until you get to the point that the gas stops passing. But you don't jam on it, no.

Q. Okay. Do you do that with your hands? Or do you do that with a tool?

A. Some caps require a tool. And some caps don't.

Q. Do you know about that specific --
A. I can't see the top of the cap.
Q. All right.
A. There's a, like, square notch on the top of the cap. It requires a tool. You put in the tool in there, and you snug it.
MR. TOUMEH: Okay. That's all my questions.
BY MS. BOZHKO:
Q. What would you do if you tried to snug a cap with your hands and it's still leaking? What are the options? Are there any options of, like, trying to go about it?
A. Yes. Now, if you try to snug the cap and it's still leaking, then you pass that information forward to your crew leader, and then they're going to determine what's next after that.
Q. Well, what are the options they can give you?
A. Well, there's many options. Me as a laborer, that wouldn't be my authority, to say what the options are. That would be up to my crew leader and the supervisor to determine that.
Q. Have you ever seen a leaking cap where you couldn't have snugged it to the point of not leaking, in your practice?
A. I've seen leaky caps. But they always got replaced with a new cap, and that always stops the leak.
Q. Oh, so one of the options of, like, how you can deal with it is getting a new cap and putting it on.
A. If that's what the crew leader and the super says to do, then yes.

Q. Okay. What are those caps -- like, were they the same caps that they're being replaced with? Like, your work -- they're, like, alike? They're on the truck? Or -- you know, when you're replacing a cap with another one? Or is it some different assembly that you work with?

A. No, I'm not 100 percent sure if they have a different cap. But pretty much, it's going to be, just grab another cap from another tee off the truck, and then try that cap, to see if that fixes the issue.

MS. BOZHKO: All right. Okay.

BY MS. LYONS:

Q. All right. I don't have any more questions. But is there anything that you think might be important, related to service tees, that we didn't discuss today? Or to this specific installation, even though I know it's not that memorable in your mind?

A. No, pretty much all the time that I've ran or done a service tee, I never had an issue with them.

Q. You haven't seen --

A. No.

Q. You haven't seen a crack in a tower?

A. No. Never seen a crack in a tower.

Q. And you haven't seen a crack in a cap?

A. No.

Q. Have you ever seen an O-ring that didn't look good enough?

A. No.
Q. No. Okay.
A. Never had an issue with them, every time I installed it.
Q. Even retiring them?
A. Even retiring them.
MS. LYONS: Okay. All right. Great. Well, thank you very much for meeting with us.
MR. PEREZ: Thank you.
(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

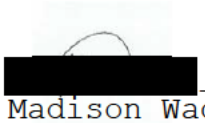
CERTIFICATE

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 Joseph Perez
ACCIDENT NO.:	PLD23LR002
PLACE:	West Reading, Pennsylvania
DATE:	April 27, 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.



Madison Wagaman
Transcriber

Joseph Perez

PLD23LR002

Joseph Perez

PLD23LR002

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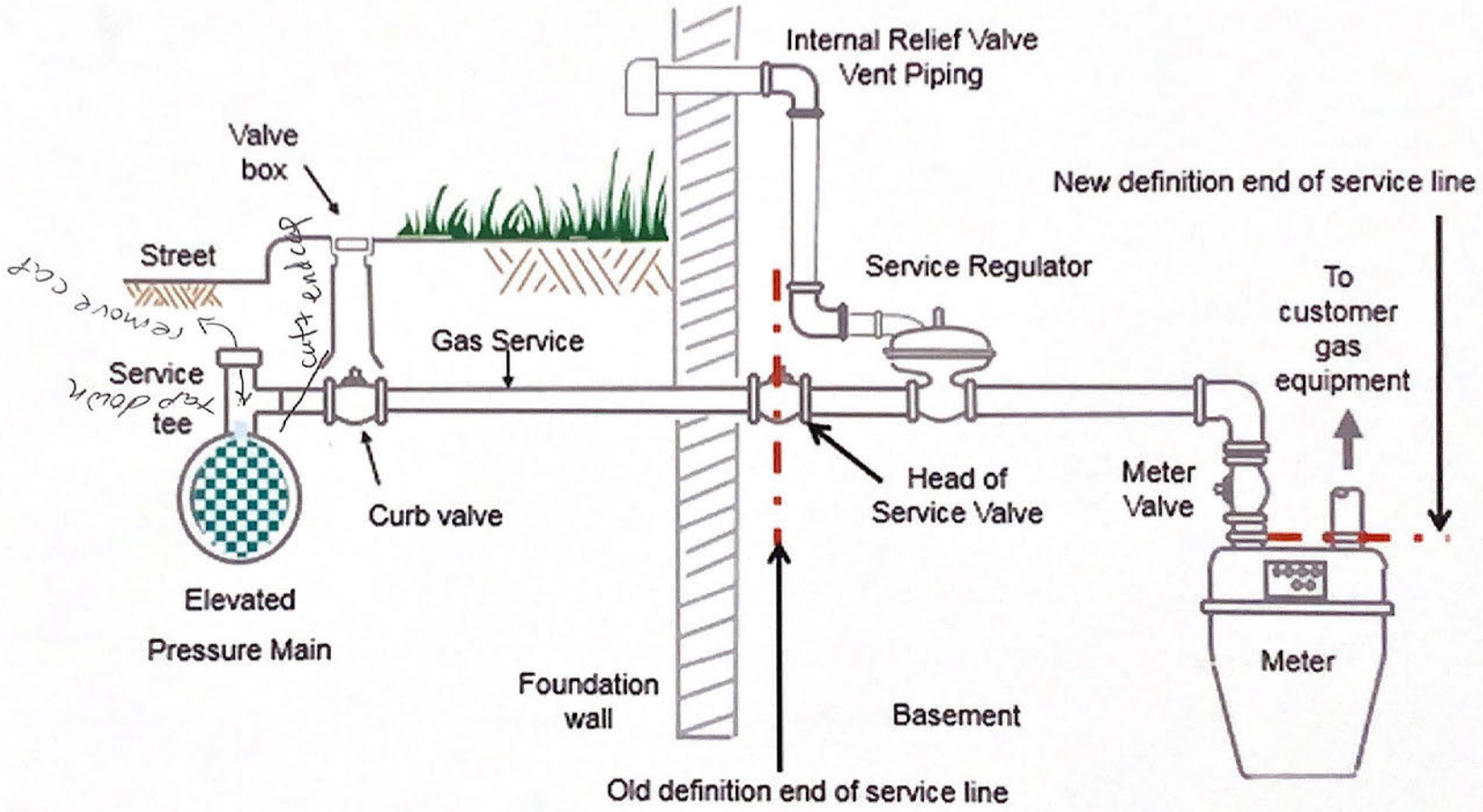

Joseph Perez

PLD23LR002

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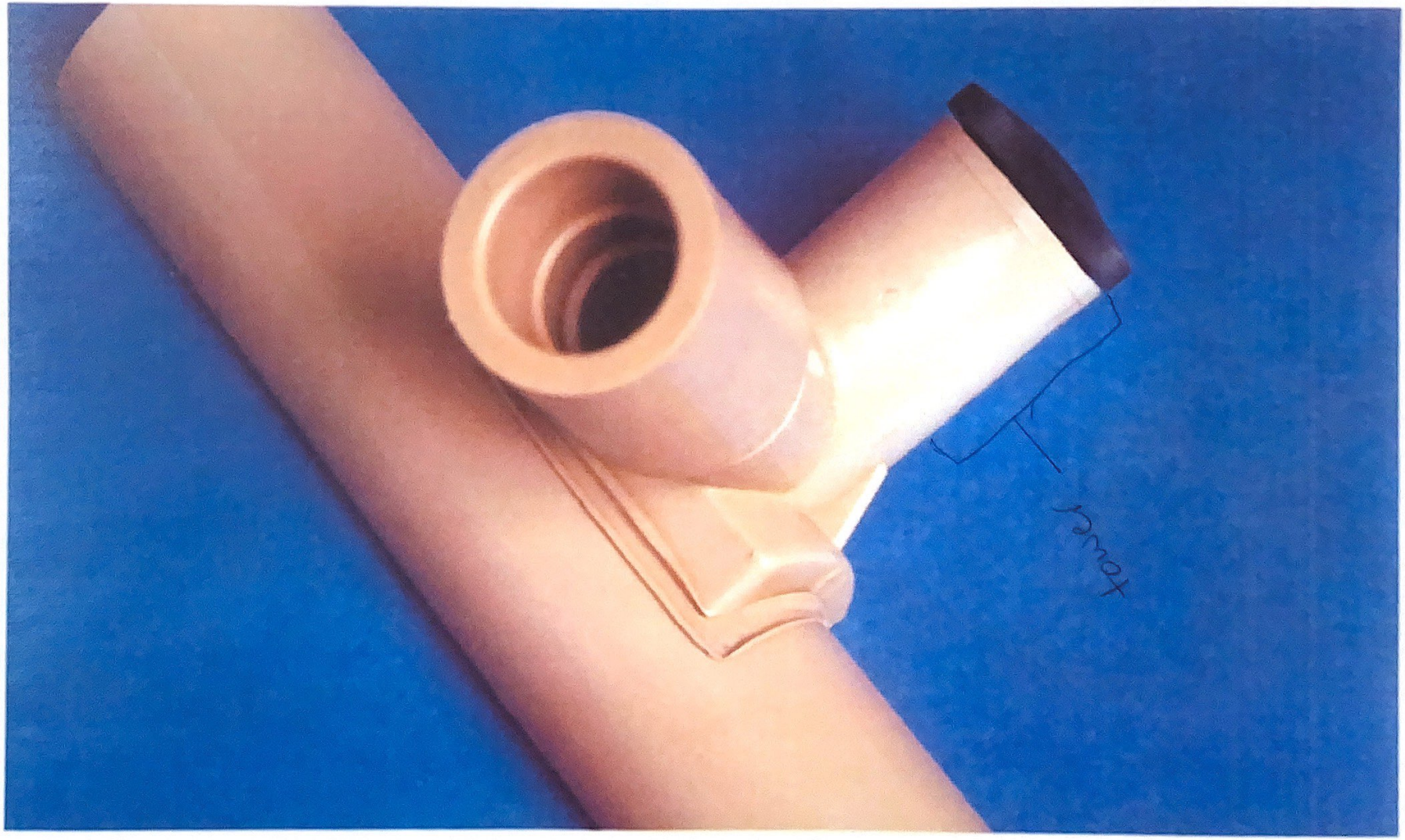

National Transportation Safety Board
Office of Railroad, Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Investigations
Washington, DC 20594

Interview Regarding Investigation PLD23LR002

UGI Corporation Natural Gas-Fueled Explosion and Fire
West Reading, PA
March 24, 2023

Name: Joseph Perez

Organization: UGI

Title: Locator

Date of Interview: April 27 2023

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

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

Signature: [redacted]