

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

EXPLOSION AT THE R.M. PALMER CANDY *

FACTORY IN WEST READING, *

PENNSYLVANIA, ON MARCH 24, 2023 *

Accident No.: PLD23LR002

* * * * *

Interview of: GABRIEL TORRES
Self-Employed Truck Driver

Via Microsoft Teams

Tuesday,
June 6, 2023

APPEARANCES:

SARA LYONS, Chief, Pipeline Investigations Branch
National Transportation Safety Board

ELENA BOZHKO, Pipeline Safety Engineer
Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission

JOHN TOUMEH, Manager
UGI Utilities

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I N T E R V I E W

(5:55 p.m. EST)

1
2
3 MS. LYONS: Good afternoon. Today is June 6th, 2023. It's
4 now 5:55 p.m. My name is Sara Lyons, and I'm a National
5 Transportation Safety Board pipeline operations and integrity
6 management group chair for this accident.

7 We're holding an interview virtually on Microsoft Teams.
8 It's being conducted as part of the investigation into the
9 explosion that occurred on March 24th, 2023, in West Reading,
10 Pennsylvania. The NTSB Case Number for this accident is
11 PLD23LR002.

12 This interview is being recorded and may be transcribed at a
13 later date. A copy of the transcript will be provided to you for
14 review 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 Please state for the record who you've selected?

19 MR. TORRES: No one.

20 MS. LYONS: Okay. Now, I'd like to have each person state
21 their name with spelling, title and agency or organization that
22 they're representing. I'll begin, and then I'll go to Elena and
23 then John. So my name is Sara Lyons, S-a-r-a, L-y-o-n-s. I am
24 the chief of our Pipeline Investigations Branch, and I'm with the
25 National Transportation Safety Board.

1 MS. BOZHKO: My name is Elena Bozhko, E-l-e-n-a, B-o-z-h-k-o.
2 I'm a pipeline safety engineer with Pennsylvania Public Utility
3 Commission.

4 MR. TOUMEH: John Toumeh, J-o-h-n, T-o-u-m-e-h. I'm the
5 manager of (indiscernible) and leak survey at UGI Utilities.

6 MS. LYONS: All right. I'm sorry, Gabriel. Can you also do
7 the same thing.

8 MR. TORRES: Oh, okay.

9 MS. LYONS: I said that, and then I passed it over. So I
10 apologize.

11 MR. TORRES: Gabriel Torres, G-a-b-r-i-e-l, T-o-r-r-e-s. I
12 don't know what you want my title to be. Ex-employee.

13 MS. LYONS: Well, what's your current position?

14 MR. TORRES: I'm self-employed now.

15 MS. LYONS: You're self-employed.

16 MR. TORRES: Truck driver, yep.

17 MS. LYONS: Okay. So did you say truck driver?

18 MR. TORRES: Yeah.

19 MS. LYONS: So let's get started with the interview. Again,
20 thanks for agreeing to talk with us.

21 INTERVIEW OF GABRIEL TORRES

22 BY MS. LYONS:

23 Q. I was wondering if you could just give a little brief
24 background of your education and responsibility and your position
25 when you were with UGI.

1 A. Yeah. I started in 2016 I believe. I worked my way up all
2 the way to crew leader. My responsibilities were running
3 services, doing leak calls, basically anything that had to do with
4 construction and maintenance. So, yeah.

5 Q. All right.

6 A. There's pretty much to it.

7 Q. Okay. Great. So, it sounds like you did a lot of different
8 jobs at UGI. Is that right? Yeah, your responsibility was
9 working with the gas assets and also --

10 A. Yeah, mostly like gas services. I did help out like other
11 departments like M&R and utility, stuff like that, but basically
12 it was just running services to new houses or new businesses or
13 repairing services or doing leaks, on call and stuff like that.

14 Q. Okay. And, so did you have experience working with gas
15 assets before you joined UGI?

16 A. Yeah, yeah. I actually worked for a contractor, Delaware
17 Valley Utility Contractors. They were a subcontractor for UGI
18 also.

19 Q. About how long were you there?

20 A. I was there let's say a year, year and a half, something like
21 that.

22 Q. Okay. And then about how long were you with UGI?

23 A. Like 5 years.

24 Q. Five years. And when did you leave? Do you remember?

25 A. It was October -- I don't know the date, but it was of '21.

1 Q. In 2021.

2 A. Yep.

3 Q. Okay. And why did you leave?

4 A. Started my own business.

5 Q. Okay. Perfect. So, as I mentioned on the phone, I was
6 calling about -- specifically about some work that was done at the
7 Palmer Building in 2021 in February. It was a meter relocation
8 project. Do you recall that project?

9 A. Yes, I do. Vaguely but, yeah, I do recall some of the stuff.
10 Like I said, it's been more than 2 years ago.

11 Q. Yeah.

12 A. But I do remember a couple things.

13 Q. All right. So if you don't mind, if you could just walk us
14 through what you remember --

15 A. Okay.

16 Q. -- and just keeping in mind that I don't normally do this
17 type of work. So if you could just start at the beginning of that
18 task --

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. -- in as much detail as you remember, I'd really appreciate
21 it.

22 A. Okay. So, we were -- I believe we were at a different job,
23 and this came in as a leak. I was trying to remember since the
24 last time I talked to you, you know, and try to gain memory of
25 this event. I don't know if it was Heath that called us or

1 Ashley, our actual UGI personnel that called us out to the leak.
2 But, I do remember the curb valve was leaking, and since the curb
3 valve was within 5 feet of the building, we had to, you know, stop
4 the leak. It was a C (ph.) leak. So that's why we had to go over
5 there. And then the meter was inside. So we ended up digging up
6 the curb valve, fusing a riser to the existing line, and just
7 moving the meter outside.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. And that's pretty much what we did --

10 Q. Do you remember --

11 A. -- that I remember.

12 Q. Okay. Do you remember what your responsibilities were that
13 day?

14 A. I remember running -- I don't remember who was on the crew.
15 I know I remember getting in a machine. I was probably an
16 operator that day, but that doesn't mean -- like I said, I don't
17 really remember who was on the crew that day, but I was also
18 training crew leaders also. So I could have been just like
19 somebody else was running the crew but I was just like overseeing
20 them, you know, make sure he was doing everything right type
21 thing. But I do remember being on a machine that day.

22 Q. Okay. And when you said that you think you were the
23 operator, what is that?

24 A. The backhoe operator.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. Okay.

2 Q. And when you say on the machine, you're talking about the
3 backhoe?

4 A. Yes, the backhoe, yeah.

5 Q. Okay. So did you -- was being a backhoe like a normal part
6 of your job? Were you doing that regularly?

7 A. That was one of the steps of becoming a crew leader. They
8 would put you as an operator when you were training another crew
9 leader.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. Like you're still on the crew and then if he has any
12 questions, you go and help him out, stuff like that with paperwork
13 and stuff.

14 Q. Okay. And I'm not sure about the career progression at UGI
15 that you went through but -- so you would have been -- can you
16 explain that again?

17 A. Yeah. So I guess I'll start from the bottom I guess. So
18 when you start, you're basically like the helper/dump truck
19 driver. And then you move up to be a locator which, you know,
20 they send you out, you locate the gas lines and all that stuff.
21 You've got to mark it with the paint. And then after that, they
22 put you to run a machine which is a backhoe, and then you become a
23 crew leader once you're proficient on all that stuff --

24 Q. Okay. And so you --

25 A. -- do all your qualifications.

1 Q. Okay. I didn't mean to cut you off.

2 A. Oh, no. I said once you get all your qualifications, and you
3 meet the standards, I think it was like 1040 of like being a crew
4 leader like trainee and then you go to your crew leader. I think
5 they changed it now. I think there's like a MEC II (ph.) rate or
6 something like that position.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. So you were a backhoe operator, and then you became a crew
10 leader, and then you were training crew leaders. Is that right?

11 A. Yeah. Yep, yep, yep. That's how -- usually the guys that
12 were crew leaders after somebody else was coming up in the ranks
13 and they were next on the list or whatnot to become a crew leader,
14 they will put you -- another crew leader, they will bump him down
15 to like an operator and then the -- I guess the crew leader to be
16 will be running the crew, if they have any information or
17 questions or whatever, you know, they have the senior guy right
18 there to ask questions.

19 Q. Okay. Great. So, what training did you have to do to get to
20 that point?

21 A. Well, you had to be locate proficient. You had to be a
22 skilled operator. Then they put you on with somebody for, like I
23 said, 1040, 1,040 hours or whatever. I think it comes out to like
24 6 months or whatnot, and then you had to be on duty crew which
25 you're running leaks and all that stuff. So you're familiar with

1 that. And then all the other qualifications that you had to get
2 throughout the years because they had like the training center,
3 and that's where you get your qualifications and stuff. Whatever
4 you need, that's where you get it at.

5 Q. Okay. Thank you. So the 1040, are you partnered with one
6 specific person for that --

7 A. No, no, they rotate you.

8 Q. Okay. So it's with someone more senior?

9 A. Yeah. Sorry. I'm closing my window real quick. I'm in the
10 car. It's starting to rain.

11 MR. TOUMEH: We need the rain. So that's happy news.

12 MR. TORRES: Yeah.

13 BY MS. LYONS:

14 Q. All right.

15 A. But, yeah. No, they just don't throw you out there. They --
16 for the most part, they pretty much make sure you're ready to run
17 a crew before they put you on your own.

18 Q. Okay. Good. So, Gabe, I wanted to share some photos with
19 you.

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. I want to make sure you're going to be able to see them
22 though. Let me see where they are. So --

23 A. Okay. Yeah, I see them.

24 Q. Can you see that? Is it big enough?

25 A. Yeah, I can actually zoom in, yeah.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. All right. So I'll let you go.

3 Q. No, you can walk through. I was actually going to just show
4 you a few pictures and see if it helps you remember any other
5 details.

6 A. Yeah. So right now the meter's still inside. I don't know
7 why it's not an updated picture, but -- so, right there near the
8 -- so you're going in the alleyway, you see the first window after
9 you like -- you're going in the alleyway. You pass the door, the
10 brown door, that first white window. Right around that vicinity
11 before the -- yeah, before them pipes that are coming down, I
12 believe that's where the curb valve that was leaking, somewhere
13 around there.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. You see how that little -- there's like a strip of sidewalk
16 there. So that's why it was a C leak because it was too close to
17 the house or a building.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. And, yeah, I'm pretty sure -- yeah, we didn't go in the road.
20 We just dug that little -- where the curb out was at, and we just
21 tied in the riser right onto that existing service, and we moved
22 the meter outside.

23 Q. So did you go in the basement?

24 A. Yes, yes. Yeah. I actually remember being inside the
25 basement. We actually had to wait for maintenance to come in and

1 open the door for us because that -- I don't know if you can see
2 it here. I guess, I guess it would be that white door over there.

3 Q. Right here?

4 A. Yeah, I think that's the one, yeah. They had to badge us in.
5 So I do remember that. And then you went down -- it was like a
6 ramp. It wasn't stairs. You went down the ramp, and then we made
7 a left and that's where they had -- I don't know what you want to
8 call it. Like big silos I guess you want to say, and they had
9 like melted chocolate --

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. -- just like turning. And to the left of that, all the way
12 to the corner, like towards the front of the building, that's
13 where the meter was at.

14 Q. Okay. So you went into this door. You turned left and
15 you're kind of --

16 A. Yep.

17 Q. -- in this area here?

18 A. Yep.

19 Q. All right.

20 A. Yep, and that's where the meter was hanging up in the corner,
21 and yeah, that's where -- we tied in the service lines in.
22 Obviously you take the meter out, put the inlet to the outlet,
23 tied that in together, and then we moved the meter outside.

24 Q. Okay. And so where the meter is hanging, I have the leaking
25 curb valve here on the sidewalk --

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. -- near one of the walls from this building that we're
3 calling Building 2. Was it on that same wall but on the inside of
4 the basement?

5 A. No, it actually was -- it was facing horizontal. So it would
6 have been like facing like the front door, like going that way
7 against the wall.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. It wasn't really on the wall. It was in the air but, yeah,
10 it would have been going that way.

11 Q. Okay. So it was hanging on the wall.

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. The same wall as the front door but down in the basement
14 interior?

15 A. Correct.

16 Q. All right.

17 A. Yep, correct.

18 Q. Good. Thank you. Okay. Let's see what we have next. And
19 the second photo. So this is a picture of -- as you noticed, the
20 first photo that I showed you didn't have -- the work hadn't been
21 completed yet. So on the left you have a similar picture where
22 the work hadn't been completed yet. You can see the curb valve
23 there --

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. -- and on the right, it's after the relocation project had

1 been completed.

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. So, I want to see if you could walk me through the excavation
4 work for this. I don't know, looking on this second picture, the
5 one on the right. Can you describe the process for excavating
6 that area to the extent that you remember?

7 A. I don't remember -- now, I'm looking at the patch. I don't
8 think we came into, I don't think we came into that road. I may
9 be wrong though looking at that patch right there. I thought we
10 didn't come into the road.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. Maybe the curb valve was in the street then. I thought it
13 was on the sidewalk, on that little piece, but I don't know. Like
14 I said, it's been 2 years I guess.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. But, no, anything -- I'm sorry. I'm trying to think now.

17 Q. That's okay. If you don't remember, I mean I don't want you
18 to say something --

19 A. No, I'm trying to think. I thought the curb valve was in the
20 little sidewalk there. But, anyways --

21 Q. Do you see the picture on the, do you see the picture on the
22 left?

23 A. Oh, no, I didn't. So that is a curb valve right there
24 painted orange. Okay. So I was right. Yeah, I didn't see that
25 earlier. I was zoomed into the other picture with the meter.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. I don't know why we would have broken the road. Maybe to get
3 a better angle for the riser. Maybe the riser was too long.
4 That's a possibility. The riser was too long. So we had to cut
5 in the road a little bit but, no, that too small for a machine.
6 So that was probably mainly all hand dug with the essential of
7 using -- we have -- they call it the chop saw, and we will cut the
8 sidewalk upwards of it or in this case, I guess the road, too, and
9 then we would have just hand dug everything.

10 Q. Okay. So, just -- I have one more picture for now of just a
11 generic inside meter.

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. And I was wondering if you could walk me through the process
14 for relocating that outside.

15 A. On this job, we would just cut it off right there at the curb
16 valve --

17 Q. Like on --

18 A. -- squeeze it off. Right here, yep. We'll cut right behind
19 it, cut that valve off because the new riser has a valve on it.

20 Q. You'll cut off the service line at the curb valve.

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. And when you say that, you mean on the main side of the curb
23 valve. Is that right?

24 A. Yeah, right on the opposite -- right on the other side of
25 that valve. Where that valve ends, that's where you cut it off?

1 Q. Here.

2 A. Yeah, I mean for a picture's sake, yeah, that would work.

3 Q. I mean on that side of the curb valve maybe.

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. Not exactly at that location. Is that what you --

6 A. Yeah, yeah.

7 Q. I just want to make sure I understand correctly what you're
8 saying.

9 A. Yeah. You're right.

10 Q. Not on this side of the curb valve?

11 A. No, no, no.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Because the valve was leaking.

14 Q. Okay. So, can you walk me through from the beginning. So
15 you just excavated the area. You know, what have exposed?

16 A. Well, I'm pretty -- well, in this case, I'm pretty sure we
17 only exposed the valve but now that I saw that patch on the road,
18 I'm thinking maybe the valve was too close to the end of the
19 sidewalk. So we had to go into the other side of that and just
20 dig a little bit so we could fuse on the riser. But I'm pretty we
21 didn't go to the main on that job.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. So, in this case, like I said, what we did, we would cut it
24 off, squeeze it off, and just fuse another plastic riser right to
25 that end where we cut it off with an electric fusing coupling, and

1 that's your new service for your meter.

2 Q. How do you isolate the gas from the main when you do that?

3 A. You squeeze it off. They have a tool that squeezes -- that
4 pinches the line.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. All right. So just from a more generic perspective, if you
8 were going to do a job, where you were going to go all the way to
9 the main, can you walk me through that process?

10 A. So, you're saying like if the valve was leaking and I had to
11 go all the way to the main?

12 Q. Uh-huh. And you were going to install a new service T.

13 A. Oh, a new service T. Okay. So depending on what kind of T
14 it is, if it was a steel T, you would have to either get a welder
15 out there to weld a cap on the T or they have these little -- this
16 other steel T that you use like a little plastic wafer that you
17 put in the end of it and you screw it back on, and that closes the
18 -- cuts the gas off for coming up the T. Well, you've got to run
19 the T -- tap the T down. The tapping thing is down, and then if
20 gas were to escape from that T, it will be blocked either with a
21 wafer or like I said, you get a welder and they weld a cap on the
22 T.

23 Q. Okay. All right. Let me just show you one more. I meant to
24 talk about retiring a service T like this. Does this look
25 familiar to you?

1 A. Yeah. That one -- oh, yeah. You just -- so you run the T
2 down, the tapping thing that makes the hole in the main, and I'm
3 pretty use -- that's the one you weld -- we used to call it a
4 name. Let me see, the proper name of it. I don't want you to
5 record the name that I used to call it. It's just like an
6 electric fuse end cap to it and that was it. I believe that's the
7 one we used to us. But those Ts, you really don't see them that
8 much.

9 Q. You don't see them much.

10 A. No, out of my whole time working there, I probably only seen
11 -- because those were the ones that were prone to leak. I
12 probably only saw like may a handful, and that's it.

13 Q. Okay. Do you know what material it is?

14 A. That -- well, that's Atalay. That's the Atalay.

15 Q. Okay. So if you were going to retire an Atalay T, can you
16 just step me through like step-by-step like I'm going to follow
17 your instructions exactly, what would I do? Let's assume that the
18 service line's been isolated.

19 A. So they have, they have an electric fusing coupling. I'm
20 pretty sure that's the one that got -- that went on these. It's
21 like an IPS electric fusing coupling, and you just burn it like --
22 when I say electric fusing, it's a machine, an electric machine,
23 and it like melts. It has coils inside of the coupling and it
24 melts it onto that plastic. I'm pretty sure what we did with
25 these.

1 Q. Where do you put that? What do you mean?

2 A. Right in the opening. The coupling goes over it.

3 Q. Right here where the service line is coming from?

4 A. Yeah. Or I mean I guess it would have a flow on it, too, and
5 then you could just cap the flow with a non-electric coupling on
6 the flow. Like I said, these Ts -- I didn't see too much of them.

7 Q. Okay. So, I'm not real clear on the process. I'm just going
8 to like walk through it with you one more time. So, let's say you
9 exposed a main and you see a T like this one. You still have the
10 service line attached. You haven't really done any work yet.

11 What's the first step? Like what can you step me through? Like
12 what do you do now? You have gas running through and --

13 A. All right. So you take that black cap off. You run that
14 tapping T all the way down so no gas is coming out. You cut
15 either the -- well, like I said, this would have been attached to
16 like a plastic line already. So in that case, then all you would
17 do was cut the -- once you have the T -- the tapping T all the way
18 down, you cut the service and then you electric fuse a coupling on
19 it, like that, and it blocks the whole gas from coming out. If
20 there -- well, the tapping Ts already down. So I guess the
21 coupling just secures it. So like if they were to have gas
22 escaping, you know, it would pass the coupling.

23 Q. Okay. And then what do you do?

24 A. That's pretty much it. That's how you retire.

25 Q. Okay. And what about the cap? What do you do with the cap

1 that you took off?

2 A. You put it back on.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. That's it, and than you soap it out, make sure it's not
5 leaking and that's pretty much it.

6 Q. Do you leave the tap down?

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. Okay. And when --

9 A. Yeah, especially in this case. It's a small pipe. Nobody's
10 going to insert that pipe. So you just leave the cap down for
11 extra precaution.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Like that, it's blocking the whole where the gas is coming
14 out of.

15 Q. Okay. And then as you're doing that work, is there anything
16 that you look out for as far as, you know, if there are any
17 issues? Do you do any like visual inspections? Do you do any --
18 you mentioned soap testing. Can you just run through any kind of
19 inspections that you do to the components as you're doing the
20 work?

21 A. I mean really, in this case, like I said, we got called out
22 to it. So there was already -- I want to say he was a UGI guy
23 that was out there investigating in the leak, and he narrowed it
24 down. So when we got there, he's already like, this is leaking.
25 This is what you guys got to do, you know. But, yeah. So like I

1 said, we just uncover it, do our thing. I think -- I'm pretty
2 sure, and this Palmer one, we just cut it off at the curb and put
3 the riser on. But, if we were to go to the T, like we would do
4 our thing, and then after we're all done, the only thing we would
5 do, just soap test it and make sure there's no bubbles coming out.

6 Q. Okay. Great. And then I just wanted to talk about the
7 excavation work a little bit. So let's assume that you were using
8 a backhoe.

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. Then, you have -- can you walk me through how you know if
11 there are other utilities or any other assets in the area?

12 A. So before the first responder calls somebody out, they should
13 have already called to do an emergency One Call. So all the
14 facilities come and mark their lines you want to say. So that's
15 how you know what's in the area. I mean it's not always right
16 because some people mismark stuff. But those how you know what's
17 in the area.

18 Q. Okay. And if -- do you ever have issues with private assets
19 being in the area? Would those have been marked also?

20 A. No, that would have not been marked. If it's like a customer
21 fuel line and stuff like that, no, because it would be no records
22 of it, you know. That would be up to the business or whatever to
23 make their own stuff.

24 Q. Okay. How would they know that they should mark it?

25 A. That I don't -- I never -- I mean it's not on the road. So

1 most likely there's not going to be no private stuff. It's mainly
2 like in yards or like in -- kind of on their property. I don't --
3 I never seen like a private line, like a water line or fuel line
4 going out on the road, but honestly I don't know how to answer
5 that because I never -- the one to say I guess -- like tell like
6 the maintenance guy or something like that like, hey, we're going
7 to dig here. You have to mark something if you have it here.

8 Q. Okay. Let me defer to Elena.

9 MS. LYONS: Elena, do you have any questions?

10 MS. BOZHKO: Sure.

11 BY MS. Bozhko:

12 Q. So, I have just a few. I want to go back to -- and just ask
13 you if you have -- do you have any records maybe or pictures of
14 the work that was done there? I think I know the answer but I
15 figured I should check?

16 A. Myself?

17 Q. Yeah, I don't know. Some guys keep like field notes or like
18 a book where they add things that were done in the field.

19 A. No, everything would have been in the program at UGI and
20 since I don't no longer work there, I don't have access to that.

21 Q. Okay. That makes sense. The other question I had, when you
22 saw the T that Sara brought up to the screen, you said that you
23 recognized it and you said that those are the Ts that are prone o
24 leakage or something along those lines.

25 A. I'm pretty sure those are the ones. Because Atalay -- so

1 Atalay was tough because it was known like to crack and stuff like
2 that. I'm pretty sure that was the one. Like I said, we didn't
3 really use them a lot. I mean I didn't really see them like
4 digging up and working. I didn't really see those Ts a lot. But,
5 there was on that's like prone to like leak or something like
6 that.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. I'm thinking it was that.

9 Q. So you don't remember like any specific training or anything
10 that they would like talk about those Ts, or --

11 A. No, not any more. I don't remember who was all on the crew
12 that day.

13 Q. I gotcha. All right. The other question I had. So, now
14 that you looked at the pictures and, you know, saw the side like
15 with the work being done, do you have any recollection like if --
16 like what would -- your part was on that job?

17 A. Well, I do remember being inside and taking off the meter,
18 and repiping inside. So basically when we would show up to a job
19 like that, like I said, I'm pretty sure I was the crew leader on
20 that day because I was running the machine and I usually wouldn't
21 be running the machine unless if I was like training somebody. But
22 in that case, like we would split the job up. So not all, like
23 three or four guys are bunched up together, you know. We'll be,
24 all right, you guys do this, I'm going to go and do this, you
25 know, and get the job done faster. But I do remember being

1 inside, taking off the meter and repiping it and -- yeah. I'm
2 pretty sure I did like inspect the like riser and stuff like that.
3 Because what I remember, it was the curb valve, and we just fused
4 the riser to the curb valve. That was pretty much a simple job
5 like it was not really too much to it. So the guy I'm pretty sure
6 I was training probably already knew what to do. So that's why we
7 split up.

8 Q. All right. And, you say that you remember being inside of
9 the machine or being responsible for the machine. Would you use a
10 machine to excavate next to that house or that would have -- or
11 you would have been bringing the machine to the site or --

12 A. No, that was too close to the building. We -- I'm pretty
13 sure we hand dug that.

14 Q. Okay. And I want to ask another question about those Ts that
15 you might have seen before. Do you know or would you recall, you
16 know, how you said that there is a cutter you would be driving
17 down to stop the flow of gas to the service line if you were to
18 retire that service. Do you recall if there was a special tool
19 that you would use or --

20 A. Yeah, they have -- gees, now you're really testing me. I
21 forgot the name was. But it's basically like -- almost like a
22 vise I would say and it has a -- it's curved inside and you put
23 the pipe -- you put it around the pipe, and you rotate it down
24 until the line pinches, and then it cuts the flow of gas. It has
25 a little stopper. So you don't like over tighten it or whatnot,

1 you know. As soon as it touches the stoppers, it should be good.
2 You start cutting the line, and you're -- obviously you're going
3 to hear a little bit of hissing because the gas that's inside the
4 line's coming out, but -- yeah, once it stops hissing, the line is
5 cut off. And then you do what you've got to do.

6 Q. Okay. Are you talking about the squeeze off tool right now
7 or --

8 A. Yeah, the squeeze off, yeah.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. Was that what you were talking about? Yeah.

11 Q. I mean it's helpful but, no. I was asking about if you know
12 if there's a tool that will drive the cutter down inside of the T.

13 A. Oh, oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Yeah, it's a little, it's a
14 little Allen wrench, and I think this one uses -- so we had two.
15 We had T one and the one you put on like a little ratchet. But,
16 yeah, it's a little Allen wrench that goes inside and you just
17 spin it all the way down until it stops. Oh, no, I think that's
18 what it was. I think with those Ts, not that they were leaking, I
19 think -- I might have got them confused now. I think those are
20 the Ts, or I might be wrong, but one of those Ts, they always said
21 that the -- if you go too much, the tapping thing falls down or
22 something like that, something like that.

23 Q. Okay. Gotcha.

24 A. So you only go down until you hear the gas and then you let
25 it go.

1 Q. Okay. And something that was supplied by UGI specifically,
2 like those wrenches or tools or were they just on the truck and
3 that's one of the things you can use do you know?

4 A. No, since I've been doing gas work, that's what they provided
5 us to use. I don't know if that's the proper tool or --

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. -- but that's one. We always use those. It's not really
8 something out of the norm. It's just a regular Allen wrench.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. Yeah.

11 MS. BOZHKO: I think that's all I have for now.

12 MS. LYONS: Okay. John.

13 MR. TOUMEH: I think I'm good on this round.

14 BY MS. LYONS:

15 Q. Okay. So you were talking about a tool that you use to
16 rotate the tap.

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. Was there also a tool that you used to make sure the cap was
19 tight enough?

20 A. No, no, that's just all hand tight.

21 Q. Hand tightened.

22 A. Yep.

23 Q. Okay. I know I kind of asked this before, but just I kind of
24 wanted to walk through. So when you take off the cap, do you do
25 any inspection of the cap to see if there's any issues or do you

1 do any other inspections of the T at all?

2 A. Not until the end. Once we do all the job, then we will just
3 soap everything out, make sure there's no leaking bubbles --

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. -- bubbles coming up, and that's pretty much it.

6 Q. And where would put soap?

7 A. Every -- anywhere that -- you'll put it on the cap. You'll
8 put it on the base where the T actually is fused onto the main,
9 and then you will put it on the -- where you squeeze it off at
10 because like I said, sometime Atalay, they tend to crack on the
11 sides. So you'll put it on that, and then you'll also put it on
12 where you put a coupling at, either electric fusion coupling or
13 stab fitting coupling.

14 Q. Okay. So, I'm going to ask you a little more about the
15 excavation work. So we talked a little bit how you would call an
16 emergency One Call, and that's how you would get the facilities
17 marked before you did any excavation work. Private facilities,
18 it sounded like they may not have been marked if there were any
19 but you didn't often encounter them. Is that correct?

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. Okay. What if you did? Like what if you did hit like either
22 a facility that wasn't marked correctly or something that you
23 didn't know what was there or just made a mistake and you hit
24 something. What would you do?

25 A. You call One Call again, and they send out a -- I don't know

1 if they -- I'm pretty sure they send out emails or call them. I
2 don't know on that end, but all you could do is call One Call out,
3 and call your supervisor, and be like I hit something that wasn't
4 marked.

5 Q. Okay. Has that happened to you before?

6 A. Yeah, actually it did. At a sewer plant in Sinking Spring.

7 Q. And so do you stay, do you stay at the sight and learn about
8 how that's resolved because you still have work to do there,
9 right?

10 A. Yeah, so in the case of the Sinking Spring and the sewer
11 plant, so we were digging. We called a One Call. Everybody came
12 out and marked out. We were digging the yard to reroute the
13 service, and I actually, I actually was digging that day, and I
14 pulled out an electric wires, pretty big wires, but -- so we
15 called the One Call again. We're like, we hit something that
16 wasn't marked. It's not our fault. So, all they did was they --
17 the sewer company came out. They're like, oh, yeah, that's ours.
18 It's a private line. We didn't -- they didn't even know it was
19 there, and they just fixed it, and we just kept on doing our
20 stuff.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. Yep.

23 Q. Okay. We heard from someone else that we interviewed that on
24 the day that this work was done in February 2021, that there was
25 some white powder observed in the excavation. Do you recall that?

1 A. No, not that I remember.

2 Q. No. Okay. And I know it's been a long time. So you might
3 not remember every detail that day, but I actually have a picture
4 that someone provided us of the excavation work when it was being
5 performed, and I'm going to share that with you.

6 A. Okay.

7 Q. So this is picture 5. So can you see that?

8 A. Yeah, I'm zooming in.

9 Q. Okay. Let me know if I need to make any adjustment on my end
10 so you can see it better.

11 A. No, no, you're good. Okay. So we did dig up the road then.
12 Yeah. So that would be me in the machine then.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Yeah. A white powder. That white stuff in there, you're
15 saying that's the white powder?

16 Q. I mean I'm not sure.

17 A. Oh.

18 Q. We were just told there was some white powder observed that
19 day. So I was just wondering if that's something that you
20 recalled?

21 A. I don't -- like I said, I didn't even remember we dug the
22 road.

23 Q. Okay. As far as this day, does this bring back any
24 recollection of what happened that day?

25 A. No. I mean now I know who was on the crew.

1 Q. Yeah.

2 A. Besides that, no, I'm pretty sure what we did -- what I said
3 is what we did. I don't think we put a new, a new T on it. I
4 thought we just did the curb.

5 Q. Okay. And I'll just -- I just have -- you probably already
6 zoomed in, but I just had a zoomed in version of that excavation
7 area in picture 6. So you can see it does kind of look like some
8 white powder in that excavation. Does that, does that seem
9 familiar to you? Do you recall that at all?

10 A. No. I mean I don't remember it. Was this main steel? No,
11 it couldn't be because it had a plastic T, right? You usually get
12 white powder when there's leaks. The gas makes this like -- they
13 call it like mold or whatever. That's where you get white powder
14 from.

15 Q. That doesn't seem familiar to you. Okay.

16 A. Not that I remember. I mean I'm not saying -- obviously it
17 was there but I don't remember it was.

18 Q. Okay. So, on the day that this work was done, this meter
19 relocation project, it was done in the basement of R.M. Palmer's
20 Chocolate Factory, did you have any interactions with the Palmer
21 staff?

22 A. Besides them coming and opening the door, no.

23 Q. No. Okay.

24 A. I mean that was the maintenance guy I believe. Yeah, the
25 maintenance guy opened the door for us. Because I'm pretty sure

1 you needed a badge to come in and out of that door.

2 Q. Oh, okay. So did that person stay with your crew?

3 A. No.

4 Q. No.

5 A. No, I'm pretty sure. No, if I'm not mistaken, I think we
6 propped the door open or he gave us the badge, one of them two.

7 Q. Okay. But he wasn't there?

8 A. No, I know he didn't stick around.

9 Q. Okay. Did your crew call him back at any time or call anyone
10 else back that you remember?

11 A. I don't remember. I mean I guess we would have because
12 whatever the gas was feeding was no longer feeding it. So he
13 would have to relight whatever was off.

14 Q. But you don't really remember that detail?

15 A. No, I don't.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. I'm pretty sure. Most likely we probably did especially if
18 he gave us a badge.

19 Q. Okay. I'm going -- so just going back to -- you retired the
20 service. You walked me through the process. You walked me
21 through finishing up the retirement. You did soap testing. And,
22 what if the soap testing showed that there was a leak? What would
23 you have done?

24 A. Well, it depends on where it was coming out of. I could go
25 multiple ways. Like if it's the main was leaking or the T on the

1 main, then we've got to a cutout or -- the service and say the
2 electric fusion coupling was leaking, then we'd have to cut it off
3 and fuse another one onto it. It all depends on where it was
4 leaking, where the bubbles would come up from.

5 Q. Okay. Are there other places it might have been leaking that
6 you'd take a different action than what you already said?

7 A. No. No, because we only check our work. If it was leaking
8 inside after where we were tying in, then we wouldn't check that.
9 We only check what we do.

10 MS. LYONS: Okay. I think that's all the questions I have
11 actually. So, Elena.

12 MS. BOZHKO: I don't think I have any. I think we've pretty
13 much covered what I wanted to ask.

14 MS. LYONS: Okay. Thank you. John.

15 MR. TOUMEH: Yeah.

16 BY MR. TOUMEH:

17 Q. Maybe a few questions, Gabe.

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. Around the excavating, what would you do if you excavated and
20 there was a facility that was unmarked and you came across it?
21 You didn't damage it yet but you came across an unmarked facility.

22 A. We would call our supervisor and call out the One Call again
23 to have the other companies come and verify that it's theirs. A
24 lot of times, that actually happened and nobody knew like what it
25 was, and they were just like, oh, well, just keep digging.

1 Q. Do you recall in this situation of the location we're talking
2 about seeing any other unmarked facilities while excavating? Does
3 anything come to mind?

4 A. No, not to be honest.

5 Q. Yeah.

6 A. I didn't even remember I was digging. I thought we hand dug
7 that.

8 Q. Fair enough. What would you do if you were a crew leader on
9 a job and someone wanted to bury a leak. There was something
10 leaking and he said let's just bury it and get on with our day.
11 I've got to go see my wife.

12 A. No, because this would have been happening more often, stuff
13 like that, and definitely I would have put that out there, no.
14 Like I know there was like -- down in Mount Penn, we did a lot of
15 work. I guess they were digging for water, and that's what they
16 were doing, just ripping stuff out. But, no, that's a big no-no.
17 I'm not just saying that for -- because we're on this right now,
18 but no, I wouldn't want that done and I wouldn't want it done at
19 my house, you know what I mean.

20 Q. Yep.

21 MR. TOUMEH: That's all I have.

22 MS. LYONS: Okay. Thanks.

23 BY MS. LYONS:

24 Q. So, Gabriel, thanks for talking with us today. I just want
25 to ask one final question. So is there anything that we haven't

1 covered today that you think might be important?

2 A. No, I don't -- like I said, it was 2 years ago. I don't
3 really remember it. I don't even work there any more but, no, I
4 think I told you guys everything I remember, and I don't have
5 anything else.

6 Q. Okay. Thank.

7 A. I didn't provide a lot of information.

8 Q. No, I appreciate your time. Thanks.

9 MS. LYONS: That concludes our interview.

10 (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: EXPLOSION AT THE R.M. PALMER CANDY
 PLANT IN WEST READING,
 PENNSYLVANIA, ON MARCH 24, 2023
 Interview of Gabriel Torres

ACCIDENT NO.: PLD23LR002

PLACE: via Microsoft Teams

DATE: June 6, 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.



Kathryn A. Mirfin
Transcriber



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