

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

PIPER PA46 CRASH NEAR CASTALIA, * Accident No.: ERA19FA188
NORTH CAROLINA, JUNE 7, 2019 *

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Interview of: RICK WINTHER
Meteorologist in Charge
ZDC CWSU

Washington Air Route Traffic Control
Center
Leesport, Virginia

Wednesday,
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APPEARANCES:

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National Transportation Safety Board

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I N T E R V I E W

(2:25 p.m.)

1
2
3 MR. SUFFERN: All right. We are on the record at 2:25 p.m.,
4 and my name is Paul Suffern and I'm a meteorologist investigator
5 with the NTSB.

6 And, Rick, we appreciate your time today, and I'm just going
7 to go through a couple things here before we start asking some
8 questions.

9 So, the NTSB is an independent federal agency charged with
10 determining the probable cause of transportations accidents and
11 promoting transportation safety. We're not part of the FAA or DOT
12 and we don't have any regulatory or enforcement powers.

13 Would the other folks there in the room go ahead and
14 introduce themselves?

15 MR. SOPER: Brian Soper, air traffic investigator with the
16 NTSB and group chair for the air traffic control group.

17 MS. MARINAS: Karena Marinas, NATCA air safety investigator
18 controller at Los Angeles Center.

19 MR. EBERHART: I'm Brent Eberhart. I'm with the FAA.

20 MR. SUFFERN: All right. Thank you. And so today we will be
21 using the services of a court reporter who will record and then
22 transcribe the interview. The transcript and not the audio
23 recording will be made part of the public docket. And so you're
24 okay with us doing that, Rick, correct?

25 MR. WINTHER: Correct.

1 MR. SUFFERN: All right. So the purpose of the investigation
2 is safety and to determine the probable cause and prevent things
3 like this happening again. Our role is not to assign fault, blame
4 or do anything with liability. So this interview is just part of
5 a fact-finding phase of this investigation. That's it.

6 So each group member will have a chance to ask questions.
7 I'll start with a round of questions, and usually we do one round
8 of questions and then maybe some follow-up if anybody needs any
9 "oh, by the way."

10 And so, Rick, if you could answer all the questions to the
11 best of your recollection. If you don't recall or don't know
12 something, it's okay to say I don't recall or I don't know. And
13 you are entitled to have one representative of your choosing there
14 in the room with you. You'd like to have somebody in there with
15 you?

16 MR. WINTHER: I'm fine the way the current setup is.

17 MR. SUFFERN: Okay. Before we get started, do you have any
18 other questions?

19 MR. WINTHER: No questions.

20 MR. SUFFERN: All right.

21 INTERVIEW OF RICK WINTHER

22 BY MR. SUFFERN:

23 Q. So for the record, Rick, can you please state your full name
24 and your position there at the CWSU?

25 A. Rick Winther, meteorologist in charge of the CWSU at the ZDC

1 Center.

2 Q. Okay. Can you spell your last name for the record?

3 A. That's W-i-n-t-h-e-r.

4 Q. How long have you been the MIC there at ZDC?

5 A. Going on 12 years.

6 Q. Twelve years. And before being the MIC there, where -- did
7 you have any other work locations?

8 A. Let's see. So I was a lead forecaster in the Sterling
9 forecast office and a lead forecaster in the Pocatello, Idaho
10 forecast office, a journey forecaster in the State College,
11 Pennsylvania office, intern in the Richmond WFO office, and then I
12 was a forecaster in Kingston, Jamaica.

13 Q. You got --

14 A. Been around.

15 Q. -- so Idaho is your only place there kind of west of the
16 Mississippi, then.

17 A. Yeah. Exactly. I'm a University of Utah graduate.

18 Q. Oh, okay. So is that where you -- so you have a college
19 degree and all that from Utah?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Okay. Is that a B.S. or a B.S/M.S. or --

22 A. A B.S., although when I worked in State College I got some
23 M.S. courses under my belt.

24 Q. Okay. But some courses, but no degree?

25 A. No master's, right.

1 Q. Okay. So leading up to the accident day, which was last
2 Friday, do you recall the shift that you were working with?

3 A. So I was working the afternoon shift. I had attended the
4 Dulles user meeting in the morning, and that started at 10 a.m.,
5 usually goes about 2 hours. That's where all the D.C. Metro tower
6 supervisors and new traffic management can meet and discuss the
7 issues. So I worked that in the morning, and then my shift out
8 here started at 2 o'clock in the afternoon on that Friday.

9 Q. And then that Thursday and Wednesday, were you just doing
10 regular airline (indiscernible)? Did you have that time off?

11 A. Let's see. Thursday, I can't remember. Thursday, I believe
12 I was on shift. I can't -- honestly, I'd have to get the
13 schedule. It's been -- the schedule's --

14 Q. Yep.

15 A. -- just been horrible lately.

16 Q. Totally fine. (Indiscernible) time here on the schedule.

17 Do you recall having any usual issues, whether it's medical
18 issues or feeling sick or any sleep problems in the 72 hours
19 leading up to the accident day?

20 A. No.

21 Q. Other than being MIC, which has quite the title in and of
22 itself, do you have any other collateral duties there at the ZDC?

23 A. None that I know of. That's it.

24 Q. Okay. As best you can recall, how would you rate the weather
25 that you were dealing with that afternoon with -- from 1 to 5, on

1 a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being the most complex?

2 A. I'd give it a 4.

3 Q. And do you recall having any unusual distractions or things
4 occurring around the accident time or that afternoon?

5 A. I wasn't here during the actual accident time. I'm not sure.
6 Exactly what time did the accident occur?

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Right around 1330.

8 BY MR. SUFFERN:

9 Q. We have it around 1:30 p.m. or something.

10 A. Yeah, I was not here at that time. The first thing that,
11 when I got on shift was Carl, the chief here, told me about an
12 accident that occurred and he needed some weather information. So
13 he wanted to know if there was a SIGMET or a CWA issued for the
14 area, and so I went and started researching that. And I gave him
15 a copy of all the data we had, our briefing sheet, PIREPs, a
16 graphical SIGMET, and the graphical CWA picture. So that was
17 probably the first duty I had getting on shift.

18 Q. Okay. And you went on shift on the day of the accident at
19 what time?

20 A. At 2 o'clock. Now, normally, so here -- so I work 8-hour
21 shifts but my forecasters work 9-hour shifts. So normally if
22 another forecaster's relieving him, he'd come in at noon, so
23 there's a little overlap between noon and 2 o'clock. But on that
24 particular day, I -- since I work 8-hour shifts and I was at the
25 Dulles user meeting that morning, I came in at 2 to relieve him.

1 Q. Okay. So then if you started -- I guess the meeting started
2 at 10, did you work till 6 that night or did you cover all the way
3 till 9 or when you got closed?

4 A. I worked till 9 that night and took -- I just put comp time
5 down for the morning.

6 Q. Okay. All right. And have you had a chance to review the
7 weather conditions on the afternoon of the accident?

8 A. I briefly looked at the weather conditions that were
9 occurring, and I did get to listen to the call, the information
10 that the controller was giving out.

11 Q. Okay. So basically, just so I understand, so basically you
12 were -- you just came in at 2, and then you were made aware of the
13 accident. So on top of fulfilling your duties at CWSU at that
14 time, you were also trying to gather information for the TMU folks
15 as far as things around the accident time, right?

16 A. Yes. That's correct.

17 Q. Okay. And how often do you have standup briefs there at the
18 ZDC?

19 A. Twice a day. The first one's at 7 a.m. in the morning and
20 the second one is at 3:30 p.m. in the afternoon.

21 MR. SOPER: What were they again? What time?

22 MR. WINTHER: They're called standup brief --

23 MR. SOPER: No, what time?

24 MR. WINTHER: Oh, 7 a.m. and 3:30 p.m.

25 BY MR. SUFFERN:

1 Q. Okay. And in general, while you're on shift there, how do
2 you maintain awareness of changing weather conditions? What kind
3 of things do you use to be able to stay updated?

4 A. We're logged in to the AWC site so we keep those graphics
5 posted. Of course, we have our satellite picture. We have
6 everything that comes in on AWCS. We've got the WARP briefing
7 terminal, so that overlays the radar satellite and all the
8 AIRMETs/SIGMETs. So that's real time.

9 Q. And as far as when you came on shift, that was basically
10 right after the accident happened and things like that, was the
11 weather conditions for the ZDC that day, was there anything
12 unusual about the weather that day?

13 A. Nothing unusual. I mean, this time of year we get
14 thunderstorms just about every day in North Carolina so it's
15 almost like a broken record.

16 Q. As far as you can recall, since you've been there going on 12
17 years now, how often do the ATC ask for a weather assist? And
18 what I mean by weather assist is like they have somebody who's VFR
19 on top or somebody's like in icing and they come down to the CWSU
20 and ask for help; hey, can you help give me a place for this
21 person to go? About how often does that occur?

22 A. I -- well, I had one just last year. So, you know, maybe
23 once or twice a year, one to three. If I had to give it a number,
24 one to three a year, where the controller or the FLM will come
25 directly to us to help with a plane.

1 Q. As far as the situational display screens that are available
2 in the sectors, who controls the imagery that goes on those? Is
3 it -- is that you guys or the CWSU or it COOP or --

4 A. We control those screens. Are you talking about the
5 situational display screens where we give the briefing or at --

6 Q. Yeah, I'm talking -- unfortunately, I'm not there in person,
7 but I'm talking about the -- I'm assuming that there's, you know,
8 big TV screens that are 40 to 60 inches wide that are at the --
9 either at one end of the sector; at the other end then usually
10 there's some kind of like five or six rotating into the weather
11 display on there, something like that, or other things that --

12 BY MR. SOPER:

13 Q. So we know the two on the end are pretty much standard
14 throughout all centers. That's the ESIS displays and those are
15 not controlled by you?

16 A. Right.

17 Q. The ones that I think, Paul, is alluding to are the ones when
18 you first walk into a sector. I notice in yours, you have it --

19 MS. MARINAS: Into the areas.

20 BY MR. SOPER:

21 Q. Yeah, you have it set -- yeah, I'm sorry, into the area, not
22 sector -- where you have a screen that's tilted in towards the
23 area that you can look up at. And like, when we were down there
24 today, we've seen the weather depiction on there across this part
25 of the U.S. and where it was kind of showing.

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. So is that -- do you have control of that, then?

3 A. We have control of that. Yeah, usually we put the SIGMETs up
4 on that and -- the latest radar SIGMETs and --

5 Q. What do you guys call that? Is there a name for that system
6 right there?

7 A. That's right out of AWC. So it's right off their home page.

8 Q. That's what you're putting out there, but you don't know what
9 they call that in here? Do they call it the weather monitor or do
10 they call it the area monitor or the --

11 A. I guess they call it the weather monitor, weather -- yeah,
12 that works.

13 Q. All right. I was curious what that --

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. And you are putting up products directly from the AWC
16 website, is that you're throwing up there?

17 A. Yeah, they're directly from there. And the reason we do that
18 is that we'll update instantaneously, so --

19 MR. SUFFERN: Are you still there?

20 MR. SOPER: Yeah. Go ahead.

21 MR. SUFFERN: Okay.

22 BY MR. SUFFERN:

23 Q. Okay. So Rick, you guys, I know -- were you guys able to
24 have any spring weather CWSU training there at ZDC for the air
25 traffic controllers?

1 A. We do not currently do that, but I've -- this comes up every
2 year since I've -- but every year I offer our services to train
3 and -- this is up, but you can ask the FAA -- but they never take
4 me up on it, so I'm -- all I can do is offer my services. But we
5 do not offer that training. I work with TMU on their training
6 that they give, but for me to actually give the training, no, I
7 don't.

8 Q. So do you provide like a couple slides to TMU and then they
9 take it and do something with it or --

10 A. Yeah, usually they make a request, can you give me this, this
11 and this. Like how much SWAP, you know, what were the busiest
12 months, you know, was it really raining last year? So we'll put
13 together the slides for them. So it's more of a request deal
14 there. I've even given the training department some -- it's
15 actually kind of old now, but some training literature with
16 PIREPs, just general weather elements. I don't know where that
17 went, but I gave that to them about, oh, 6, 7 years ago. So yeah,
18 usually it's a request to me for information.

19 MR. SUFFERN: Okay. All right. That's all the questions I
20 have for now. Brian, I'll toss it off to you.

21 MR. SOPER: Okay.

22 BY MR. SOPER:

23 Q. So going back to the pre-duty weather briefing that -- since
24 you guys have been doing that now for a little while, I'm kind of
25 curious if there's been feedback from the air traffic control

1 element on the usefulness of those pre-duty weather briefings?

2 A. I can't really say there's been feedback. The only feedback
3 I've gotten is, if they're long, they'll tell us they're too long.
4 So long meaning like 3 minutes or more. If we can keep them 2
5 minutes or less, they seem to be pretty happy.

6 Occasionally, we get little in the weeds type feedback. You
7 know, they like graphical icons in the pre-duty weather briefing.
8 They really like a headline page; they seem to really like that.
9 They can listen to just the headline and get pretty much what they
10 need. That's about it.

11 I -- you know, I'm -- I've discussed this with all our CWSUs.
12 We don't -- sometimes we only get the negative feedback. We don't
13 always get positive feedback.

14 Q. Okay. When -- during its initial development, was it
15 something that was just kind of handed to you that this is what
16 we're going to do now, we need you to develop some sort of thing,
17 or did you -- do you recall how that was -- was it collaboratively
18 developed with you and the NATCA folks or the management folks
19 here, and how it really went?

20 A. Not at all. It was you will do this and that's it. The FAA
21 told us to do it, and then they told us to move our time up to
22 come into work. We did that. We were pretty much told. We were
23 never included in the process of organizing this or generating the
24 briefing. It was just you will do this; here's how you're going
25 to do it.

1 And the problem we have now is -- so the FAA supported us
2 with a VIMEO. We put out a VIMEO, but the FAA said they're
3 pulling that contract at the end of the month. So the Weather
4 Service right now is scrambling. They don't know what to do to
5 get that video out there to the public or to our towers and our
6 TRACON, who all use it now. I think it is a great tool, but --
7 so, you know, not to be negative, but the FAA told us that we
8 needed to do something and we haven't really got all the tools to
9 make it extremely successful.

10 Q. So right off the bat, just talking about that, I mean, it --
11 since you've been doing it, again, since you've been doing it for
12 a little while, and along the lines of what you just mentioned
13 that you don't necessarily have all the tools to make it the most
14 successful product or the most useful product or maybe reach the
15 potential that it possibly could, is there something that stands
16 out to you right away, besides the VIMEO contract, that is like,
17 you know, if we could do this, this would just be so much more
18 value added to them or this needs work, somebody -- we need to go
19 back to the drawing table and find out exactly what they need so
20 we can develop a product that is most useful for them or -- I
21 mean, is there anything that just stands out right away like,
22 yeah, we've been battling this since we started doing it?

23 A. Yes. So --

24 Q. Go ahead.

25 A. -- what we could do is -- what we need -- I don't know if

1 it's from the FAA side of the house or the Weather Service side of
2 the house, but we need center-centric maps. So, for instance,
3 getting a jet stream into our pre-duty weather briefing, it's not
4 that easy. You have to copy/paste it; the controllers don't know
5 what it means to have just wind barbs on the jet stream, so we
6 have to put arrows on there. So what we need is a repository of
7 maps that we can just use for our pre-duty weather briefings to
8 make it much simpler, easier, we're all on the same plate.

9 Q. So a controller can understand it?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. I can get that.

12 A. Controllers understand it, and it used to go through a
13 committee where, yeah, a controller can understand it. Right now,
14 all the CWSUs are putting different graphics together and we're
15 only getting the feedback now that, you know, jet streams, some
16 people don't understand it. Some people are using streamline
17 analysis, some people are using wind barbs. We use everything.
18 We put the words there and we put arrows on there and we use wind
19 barbs. I mean, can't understand our jet stream -- but yeah,
20 that's a problem.

21 So we need somebody to put together the graphics for us that
22 we can just use locally, whether it's a national graphic and we
23 can parse it out for just our area, that would be great. But --

24 Q. So that essentially you can go in and have your airspace map
25 up there geographically and put in a -- you know, the frontal

1 information and stuff like that that's graphical. You can just
2 pull it and go bam. Bam, and give a picture --

3 A. Bam, right. And it's been approved by the controllers.

4 Q. -- paint a quick picture for the controllers so they
5 understand it rather than --

6 A. Right.

7 Q. -- like you said, wind barb stuff, I look at that shit I
8 might as well be trying to read sheet music kind of.

9 A. And we didn't know that at the time.

10 Q. You know? Oh, yeah. I mean --

11 A. We can understand it.

12 Q. Yeah, we don't -- exactly. You guys -- I mean, Paul sends
13 them to me all the time, and I look at them and go, holy shit,
14 man, tell me what that really means.

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. I mean, I don't really know. So that's a good point. That's
17 a really good point. That's interesting.

18 A. So, yeah.

19 Q. So right now you're just kind of doing the best you can with
20 what you have, essentially.

21 A. Right. We're pulling the graphics together wherever we can
22 get them from, and each CWSU does it differently, so --

23 Q. So, out of curiosity, right along those lines then, what you
24 just said, so each CWSU doing things differently, we've seen that
25 because we've seen a lot of people's examples and a lot of

1 peoples' use of it. I'm curious. Has there been any type of
2 collaborative CSU work done, like do you guys have any -- I seem
3 to recall you guys used to have some sort of maybe monthly call-in
4 or something, where CWSU MICs got together and talked about, you
5 know, the meat of the day and what's going on and what's happening
6 out here and challenges you're having and all that kind of stuff.
7 Has this been something that's been talked about in there with
8 regards to maybe trying to -- hey, look, we're not getting much
9 help from the FAA on this but we're mandated to do it, you know,
10 can we --

11 A. Oh, yeah. Yeah. We were on the last call --

12 Q. -- can we, you know, learn some stuff together and try to
13 collaborate a few things between us? Is there anything like that
14 going on?

15 A. Oh, yeah. Yeah, we've brought that up. In fact, we're
16 working on that. But we're trying to put out the fire right now
17 within the VIMEO deal, which June 30th goes away. So how do we
18 get our product out there without VIMEO? So we're putting out
19 fires right now.

20 But no, all that has been discussed. We do have people who
21 are looking into it, but, you know, everybody's short staffed and
22 we're just doing what we can to make it work.

23 MR. SOPER: All right. That's all I've got for now. I'm
24 going to go ahead and pass it along to Karena.

25 BY MS. MARINAS:

1 Q. So earlier when you were asked to rate the weather that day
2 from 1 to 5, and you gave a 4, was that for your shift or the
3 afternoon shift after you got here that you were answering for?

4 A. (No audible response.)

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. Very good question. Yes.

7 Q. Right.

8 A. That's for my shift.

9 Q. Okay. So -- because before that all you know of it is what
10 you looked back at, right?

11 A. Right.

12 Q. So what are the standards that you guys have here generally
13 for issuing a center weather advisory?

14 A. So if we think it's an impact to aviation -- it doesn't have
15 to be thunderstorms; it could be turbulence, icing, LIFR
16 conditions. But in this particular case, it was thunderstorms.
17 You know, anything that gets above 32,000 feet in North Carolina
18 is an impact. So I believe this thunderstorm was approaching
19 43 -- 43,000 feet, or if it wasn't there it was probably getting
20 close to that.

21 So it's a discretion, it's at the discretion of the
22 forecaster, but in this particular case it was obvious that --
23 there was no SIGMET out at the time, so we -- you know, the first
24 thing to do is get something out there, a CWA, so that a SIGMET
25 will eventually cover it.

1 And, now, when I say forecaster's discretion, you don't even
2 have to have a thunderstorm up to 32,000 feet in the D.C. Metro
3 area, you know. I tell my staff immediately get on that as soon
4 as you see something in that D.C. Metro area.

5 Q. And what's the difference there?

6 A. Because you have a lot of ascending and descending flights
7 and so it doesn't -- we can have low top just shower activity
8 cause problems. So if the flights are very complicated -- as you
9 guys know, it's a very complicated airspace, that you want to make
10 sure everybody at the TRACON towers and Center are aware.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. And most of our traffic in North Carolina is en route, so --

13 MS. MARINAS: Okay. I think that's all I have for now.

14 MR. WINTHER: Those were too easy.

15 MR. SOPER: All right. Go ahead, Brent.

16 MR. EBERHART: I don't have anything today. Thank you.

17 MR. SOPER: All right. I guess, Paul, back to you for now.

18 Do you have any additional stuff yet?

19 MR. SUFFERN: I've just got one more quick one, Rick, I
20 think.

21 BY MR. SUFFERN:

22 Q. As far as when you're issuing CWAs and things like that,
23 how's the communication with the AWC as far as do they ask you to
24 wait so they can issue a SIGMET or is there any collaboration
25 there?

1 A. Yeah. We actually have MWS chat that we collaborate with
2 them on. So usually -- so, for instance, if we get a severe PIREP
3 we usually chat with them on that because a severe PIREP will
4 trigger a CWA.

5 In this particular case, we did not get a severe PIREP but we
6 would probably -- the first thing we do is probably issue a CWA.
7 Now I'm not sure if Todd collaborated with the AWC, but we would
8 issue a CWA and then, if we have time, we would let the AWC know
9 on MWS chat that we issued a CWA for a certain area. Of course,
10 getting the CWA out itself is the priority.

11 And then, you know, sometimes in an event like that we may
12 ask -- one way we might approach it is, if it's getting close to,
13 you know, the new hour where they'll issue their SIGMETs, we'll
14 ask them if they're issuing a SIGMET for a particular area first
15 before we go and issue. And if they respond that they aren't
16 issuing right now, then we immediately issue our CWA. It may not
17 have reached the criteria that AWC issues it for.

18 So does that answer it, Paul?

19 MR. SUFFERN: Yep.

20 MS. MARINAS: Can I ask a question? You said you didn't --

21 MR. SUFFERN: That's all the questions I had for right now,
22 Brian. Do you have any more?

23 MR. EBERHART: Yes.

24 MS. MARINAS: Yeah.

25 MR. SOPER: Go head.

1 BY MS. MARINAS:

2 Q. So you said you didn't get any significant PIREPS that day
3 or --

4 A. Well, let me take that back because I didn't work --

5 Q. Yeah.

6 A. -- his shift. But went back to look and I don't think the
7 PIREPs triggered him issuing a CWA. That's what I was trying to
8 say.

9 Q. Oh, okay.

10 A. I don't -- we did get probably a couple significant PIREPs,
11 but I don't think that was the reason for him issuing a CWA. And
12 you would have to ask Todd, but --

13 Q. Okay. That triggered --

14 A. I think he issued because of the radar, what the radar was
15 indicating.

16 Q. What is the process for a significant PIREPs here, like, if
17 you get them?

18 A. You'd have to ask that. So -- so you mean -- okay, do you
19 want me to start with the controller and then --

20 Q. Yeah.

21 A. Okay. So the controller -- so we issue the briefing sheet in
22 the morning. I don't know if you guys have looked at that
23 briefing sheet that we issue? So we're actually --

24 Q. No.

25 A. Okay. So at the top we have five elements. We have

1 thunderstorms, turbulence, icing, ceilings -- turbulence, icing,
2 ceilings -- what else? Icing, turbulence, ceilings, and wind?
3 There's icing, turbulence, compression and low-level wind shear.
4 So if they haven't -- so we hand that out in the morning right
5 after our pre-duty weather briefing.

6 Q. To who?

7 A. To TMU. We used to hand it out to the FLMs. We no longer
8 do. We just issue it to the OM, to the STMC, and to the weather
9 coordinator desk at TMU, and it goes on the Internet. And so that
10 should give TMU an idea who should be soliciting for PIREPs. If
11 there's an X in their area, they should be soliciting PIREPs for
12 thunderstorms, turbulence, whatever.

13 It was at the request of the OM desk that we used to -- so it
14 was only 6 months ago when we were handing it out to all the FLMs
15 and it wasn't very helpful, I guess, to them. So the OMs told me
16 to just hand it out to the OM, the TMU people, and the STMC would
17 get to the FLMs that way.

18 So I forget what the question is. I'm kind of just rambling.

19 Q. What's the significant PIREP process here?

20 A. Oh. So, okay. So once that's out, the area knows to solicit
21 for PIREPs. So the controller will get the PIREP. If it's, you
22 know, moderate turbulence over a certain area, he'll send it on
23 the ERIDS (ph.), and then it goes over to Flight Data. Flight
24 Data will disseminate it out to the world, and if it's severe
25 they'll give us a hard copy of severe, and then we issue a GI to

1 everybody if there's -- we actually issue the actual PIREP. And
2 then we usually call the AWC or chat with the AWC on whether we
3 should issue a CWA.

4 Q. If there are any changes throughout the day, you know, to
5 what you gave them in the morning on the sheet, does that get out
6 to them and how does it get out to them? Could you tell us?

7 A. It should, because we do the pre-duty weather briefing three
8 times a day, so it's -- pre-duty weather briefing is 5:45 a.m.;
9 that's when it's due. 12:30 -- and so 1230, if there are any
10 updates, they would get it in that update pre-duty weather
11 briefing.

12 Q. So if somebody's been working their shift for that whole time
13 -- like (indiscernible) or anywhere in FLM --

14 A. And things change?

15 Q. -- and things change, how do they get that?

16 A. That's a good question. There's always been that
17 communication issue in the Center. So we'd love to talk to every
18 controller and let them know that changes are occurring, but right
19 now our conduit of communication is through TMU. And so if there
20 are any changes, we go right to TMU and tell them, and we're there
21 almost every hour during thunderstorms. We're talking to the STMC
22 and telling them, well, this has changed, this has changed, expect
23 thunderstorms to develop here, expect severe turbulence here. So
24 our number one contact is TMU.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. And I think they're trying to rectify the communication
2 problem by having these walkers. They're just starting that on
3 Thursday, Friday and Sundays that will --

4 Q. I was going to ask about that. Not you --

5 A. -- communicate with TM -- oh.

6 Q. -- but I saw that they had a briefing about walkers and I was
7 wondering --

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. -- what that's going to entail.

10 A. So they'll communicate in each area from -- when they carry
11 the TMU data information to and from.

12 Q. So it's going to go from TMU -- it's not going -- the walkers
13 aren't going to involve you?

14 A. Well, it could if there's weather information that's
15 involved. Because we'll tell TMU, and then the walkers will take
16 that information from TMU and then it'll go both ways, they'll
17 take it --

18 Q. So the walkers -- but the walkers won't come directly to you?

19 A. No. They won't come directly to us. At least currently,
20 it's not the way it's supposed to be done.

21 MR. SOPER: This sounds very Game of Thrones, by the way.

22 MR. WINTHER: Yes.

23 MR. SOPER: The walkers.

24 MS. MARINAS: Really? I was just thinking like -- I was just
25 imagining zombies.

1 MR. SOPER: Yeah, there you go -- Walking Dead.

2 MS. MARINAS: Yeah, done (indiscernible) --

3 MR. WINTHER: Yeah, how do tell controllers every day there's
4 thunderstorms? So it becomes -- you have to make it appealing.

5 MS. MARINAS: Now I'm done.

6 MR. SOPER: Okay. I've got kind of a little bit of an off
7 kilter -- or not off kilter, but off subject question that's
8 general in nature with regards to SIGMETs in their current state.

9 BY MR. SOPER:

10 Q. Okay. So you've been doing this for quite some time and
11 you've been dealing with air traffic controllers for quite some
12 time. So there's been a long history of we talk about SIGMETs all
13 the time. SIGMETs contain some very valuable information or they
14 can contain some -- and not just SIGMETs -- SIGMETs, CWAs as well,
15 and hazardous weather advisories as a whole. I actually put more
16 value sometimes I think myself in CWAs than I do in SIGMETs. I
17 think SIGMETs seem to be painted with a much broader stroke. CWAs
18 are usually something that's coming from local experts that know,
19 like there's some real validity. If they're putting that out,
20 there's a real issue there. Like I feel like, whoa, CWA.

21 But that being said, what's your feeling about controllers'
22 understanding what that -- what the content of these are and what
23 it really means to them? Or is it more of a box checking
24 exercise, like SIGMET came out, got to tell them SIGMET's out, get
25 it on IWAS, da, da, da, da, box checked, I broadcast it? I

1 mean -- and I know you can't speak for every controller and
2 everyone's different, but as a general, as a whole, do you think
3 that information is making its way out like it should or like it
4 could, to the end user?

5 A. I don't think it is. I mean, because we have AIRMETs and
6 SIGMETs.

7 Q. Yeah.

8 A. I think they pretty much, AIRMETs are not -- I think they
9 ignore AIRMETs. Because --

10 Q. Right.

11 A. And I don't think they actually get printed out as strips or
12 whatever. Now it's on a -- it's not the UREP (ph.). What is it
13 now? The --

14 Q. EDST.

15 A. EDS, yes. Yeah, so AIRMETs don't get printed out there or
16 show up. So -- but when it comes to a SIGMET I would say, you
17 know, there's some -- there is some, you know, alarm there that I
18 would -- just taking to a few controllers on it, if they take it
19 seriously, you know, that SIGMETs are a more serious product. I
20 couldn't go beyond that as far as telling you --

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. -- you know, if it's important for them to call out the
23 weather.

24 Q. So here's another thing that's long been a challenge for air
25 traffic control, is that we get these SIGMETs and we've got a

1 whole lot of work to do, right. We're sitting there, you know,
2 we're moving traffic, trying to keep them around, give a DDH
3 (ph.), do whatever we have to do, and at the same time all of a
4 sudden these weather things pop up. So at the time that we're the
5 busiest those are the times that we get these weather things, too,
6 on top of it. We've got to broadcast them as part of the
7 requirement, but it's very, you know, da-da-da-da-da-da-da, and
8 it's out the door, and how useful is that information to the guy
9 flying along? So like, for instance --

10 A. Especially the coordinates --

11 Q. -- just to make an example, this guy -- yeah. I mean, like
12 this -- you know, do you think he's up there plotting this out in
13 his thing? You know, probably not. Is he going to change
14 frequency and go to IWAS? Probably not.

15 A. I'm hoping he has an iPad up there, for this graph --

16 Q. Yeah. Well, okay, graph. That's where I was going to go
17 with this, and I'm sorry to take you around the block to get to
18 where I was going. But the one thing that I've also always felt,
19 and I've seen and I've heard it from other controllers now, is we
20 show them the AWC page that shows SIGMETs graphically. It shows
21 the graphic boundary of the SIGMET and what it is that's in there.
22 And they're like, yes, that would be great, if I could see that.
23 That makes -- that has much more value to me getting the
24 information to the pilot that's going to need it because I don't
25 necessarily know -- I listen for key things in that SIGMET like,

1 yeah, I know that VOR is in my airspace, that affects me, I need
2 to read that one. But I can't necessarily picture in my head that
3 polygon exactly where --

4 A. And I agree.

5 Q. -- it goes from here to here.

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. So I'm not a hundred percent sure, so I'm just going to put
8 it out there and make sure they get it; whereas, if that was
9 graphically there, I can see this guy's headed that way. I can
10 tell this guy, you know, I show SIGMET whatever is valid and is
11 directly in your current projected route of flight.

12 A. Would it be better to have like a listing of sectors that
13 cover -- are covered in that?

14 Q. I'm just curious if there is a way -- when you talked earlier
15 you said you put the SIGMETs up there. Are SIGMETs graphically
16 depicted on that weather display that you guys put out there or do
17 they have the ability to be depicted on there?

18 A. Well, we have three displays, so -- and the one display
19 that's facing the CWSU -- I don't know if you were up there today.

20 Q. Yeah, we were.

21 A. That's the one -- that one was turned off yesterday or the
22 day before because we lost the connection to it. But we always
23 display the SIGMETs on there.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. And then there's the big AWIPS display that we can turn --

1 shape towards us or if you noticed the aisle.

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. We usually put a satellite and SIGMETs up on there.

4 Q. Now SIGMETs in their text format or in their --

5 A. The text format.

6 Q. In text format, tell us what it is.

7 A. The weather polygons. Yeah. The (indiscernible) red

8 polygons, but we'll text --

9 Q. Oh, the polygon shows up for where that --

10 A. Yes, where it is.

11 Q. -- SIGMET is. Okay. All right.

12 A. Yeah, overlaid with the satellite picture. But we don't put
13 it up every day. We only put it up when there's big events.

14 Q. I get it.

15 A. I mean SIGMETs.

16 Q. I get it.

17 A. And then the third display is where we do our pre-duty --
18 where we do our standup briefings, and we always have that on the
19 latest SIGMETs.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. So our problem is --

22 MS. MARINAS: But none of those are in the area, right?

23 MR. WINTHER: I know. Our problem is how do we communicate
24 that directly to the controller? I've always struggled with that.

25 I mean, how do you --

1 BY MR. SOPER:

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. It would be great if a controller could just have that
4 display right there.

5 Q. Oh, thank you. Pie in the sky is this should be on the
6 screen.

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. There should be a toggle-able map --

9 A. There should be some toggle, off and on.

10 Q. -- that they can -- yes. And, you know, I think that that's
11 certainly --

12 A. You've got your whole --

13 Q. Some people will immediately complain, I don't want no more
14 clutter on my scope.

15 A. Well, so you can turn it off --

16 Q. When you're (indiscernible) leave it there. That's right,
17 you don't need to be able to access it.

18 So you know SIGMETs are going to come through and you're
19 going to have to read them, toggle it out. Hey, I just got a
20 SIGMET; boom, let's toggle it and see what that one was. Oh, it's
21 over here? Doesn't apply to me.

22 A. Yes. Yes. Yes.

23 Q. Don't care.

24 A. That's --

25 Q. That's great.

1 A. -- simple, but --

2 Q. Okay. I'm just curious.

3 A. It's the technology, I guess, that goes with it.

4 Q. Okay. I know we kind of went around there a little bit but
5 I'm just -- I'm struggling with this because we come into these a
6 lot of times and we talk a lot about, oh, the SIGMETs were an
7 issue or I didn't get the SIGMET. Well, what would the pilot have
8 really gotten had you sent it? Because the way you say a SIGMET
9 to them is so convoluted anyway it's like SIGMET blah, blah, blah,
10 validate (indiscernible) on IWAS, da-da-da-da-da. And they go,
11 okay. Did -- the pilots don't immediately jump over and go to
12 IWAS. They're like -- they're trying to fly a plane in weather
13 and they don't want to switch frequencies.

14 A. Right.

15 Q. And if it's a 121 guy, if they're real concerned, they'll get
16 something from dispatch, you know what I mean?

17 A. Yeah. Yeah.

18 Q. They're not -- you know, and they're using weather in the
19 cockpit and everything now. So --

20 A. And I don't know the whole deal of this event, but -- I mean,
21 I looked at it and all these commercial airliners are going around
22 the cells --

23 Q. Yes.

24 A. -- and then there's this one lone guy, he goes right in the
25 middle of a (indiscernible) --

1 Q. So what do we --

2 A. -- right in the middle. It's like how do you -- so this is
3 where that -- it's -- this is where that thing where you could say
4 it's a very low probability but high impact. Well, this is the
5 lowest probability possible but catastrophic impact.

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. Because he flew right into the -- so how do you -- yeah, I
8 don't -- that was just horrible.

9 Q. Yeah.

10 A. Was just a horrible thing to fly -- had he gone like 5 miles
11 east or west, you know. I'm sure he was hit by tremendous updraft
12 and then tremendous downdraft --

13 Q. Trust me, trust me, we feel your pain.

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. Yeah, I think it was pretty violent when he hit it, once he
16 got that center of that cell. Okay.

17 A. Yeah. So it's -- yeah, I mean, it's -- so --

18 MR. SOPER: All right. I don't have any additional things.

19 I just kind of wanted to get a feel for your feeling on that
20 stuff. What about you guys? Any "oh, by the ways"?

21 Paul, back to you, buddy.

22 MR. SUFFERN: Okay. Thank you.

23 Rick, do you have any other things that we may have not have
24 asked that you can think of?

25 MR. WINTHER: No. I just hope, you know, whatever you guys

1 find and we can improve upon, let us know. We're always trying to
2 improve.

3 MR. SUFFERN: Thank you for your time today, Rick.

4 We'll go off the record at 3:07.

5 (Whereupon, at 3:07 p.m., 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: PIPER PA46 CRASH
 NEAR CASTALIA, NORTH CAROLINA
 JUNE 7, 2019
 Interview of Rick Winther

ACCIDENT NO.: ERA19FA188

PLACE: Leesburg, Virginia

DATE: June 12, 2019

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.

