UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	*
	*
NATURAL GAS DISTRIBUTION PIPELINE	*
LEAK AND MULTISTORY STRUCTURE	* Docket No.: DCA-14-MP-002
EXPLOSION IN HARLEM, NEW YORK	*
MARCH 12, 2014	*
	*

Interview of: JOHN LOBELLO

Con Edison
4 Irving Place
New York, New York

Wednesday,
August 6, 2014

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: RAVI CHHATRE
Accident Investigator

APPEARANCES:

RAVI CHHATRE, Investigator-in-Charge
National Transportation Safety Board
Washington, D.C.

KALU KELLY EMEABA, Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

MATTHEW NICHOLSON, Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

RICHARD DOWNS, Survival Factors Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

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Gas Distribution Services
Con Edison
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CHRIS STOLICKY, Utility Supervisor (Safety)
New York State Department of Public Service
(Party Representative)
New York, New York

BELINA ANDERSON, Esq.
(Representative on behalf of Mr. Lobello)

I N D E X

I N T E R V I E W

MR. CHHATRE: Good afternoon. Today is Wednesday, August 6, 2014. We are currently in Con Edison's facility located at 4 Irving Place, New York. We are meeting regarding the investigation of natural gas distribution pipeline leak and multi-story structures explosion that occurred on March 12, 2014, in Harlem, New York.

My name is Ravi Chhatre, I'm with the National Transportation Safety Board located in Washington, D.C., and I'm the Investigator in charge of this accident. The NTSB Investigation Number for the accident is DCA-14-MP-002.

I would like to start by notifying everyone present in this room that we are recording this interview and we may transcribe it at a later date. Transcripts will be provided directly to the interviewee for review and identifying any typographical errors. The transcript may be posted in NTSB's public docket.

Also I'd like to inform Mr. John Lobello that you are permitted to have one other person present with you during the interview. This is a person of your choice, your supervisor, friend, family member or if you choose no one at all.

Please state for the record your full name, spelling of your name, organization you work for and your title, business contact information such as mailing address and whom you have chosen to be present with you during your interview.

MR. LOBELLO: John Lobello, Supervisor for New York City DEP, BWSO, 18 Brockley Avenue South, Westport, Connecticut.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No personal.

MR. CHHATRE: No personal information.

MR. LOBELLO: You just said address. So, okay.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Work address.

MR. LOBELLO: Work address? 38th Street location.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Give the phone number at the address.

MR. LOBELLO: [redacted].

MR. CHHATRE: Okay. And your title.

MR. LOBELLO: And I guess I have Belina as my --

MR. CHHATRE: And your title?

MR. LOBELLO: I'm a supervisor.

MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Now, I'd like to go around the room and have each person introduce themselves. Please state your name, spelling of your name, your title and organization that you represent, and your business contact information, starting from my right.

MR. NICHOLSON: Matthew Nicholson, NTSB Investigator, spelled M-A-T-T-H-E-W, Nicholson, N-I-C-H-O-L-S-O-N, e-mail [redacted]

MR. EMEABA: Kalu Kelly Emeaba, spelled K-A-L-U, K-E-L-L-Y, E-M-E-A-B-A, I'm an NTSB Investigator. My e-mail address [redacted].

MR. MCCARTON: My name's Frank McCarton, I'm Deputy Commissioner in the Office of Emergency Management for the City of New York. I'm a Party Member -- I'm the New York City Party Member on the investigation. My e-mail is [redacted]

MR. GEORGELIS: Anastasios Georgelis, A-N-A-S-T-A-S-I-O-S, G-E-O-R-G-E-L-I-S. I'm here with Frank. I'm with the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. My title is Director of Field Operations for Water and Sewer Operations. My e-mail address is [redacted]

MS. ANDERSON: My name is Belina Anderson, B-E-L-I-N-A, last name A-N-D-E-R-S-O-N. I'm an Assistant Counsel with the Bureau of Legal Affairs for the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. My contact e-mail is [redacted]

MR. SINGH: Leonard Singh, L-E-O-N-A-R-D, S-I-N-G-H, Chief Distribution Engineer of Gas Operations, Con Edison. Also the NTSB Party Rep on this investigation. It's [redacted]

MR. STOLICKY: Chris Stolicky, S-T-O-L-I-C-K-Y. I am the New York State Party Rep in this investigation. I am the Utility Supervisor of Safety for the New York State Department of Public Service. E-mail address is [redacted]

INTERVIEW OF JOHN LOBELLO

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. Thanks. Mr. Lobello, for the record, please tell us

your education background, formal training, and what your responsibility is involved.

A. I have a B.A. in Communications. I'm a Supervisor at the 38th Street maintenance location. I primarily do leak detection work at that location for the Borough of Manhattan.

Q. As the supervisor what is it that you do on a daily basis?

A. I supervise the crews in daily activities within the city, investigating.

Q. Okay. So do you go with them for leak detection?

A. Primarily, no. They do their own investigations. I primarily do the leak detection aspect plus all the activities that are involved, supervision involved, the shutdowns and whatnot.

Q. Okay. So your crew goes on to their assigned location and does the leak detection?

A. The no leak detection crews?

Q. Uh-huh.

A. They're doing the daily investigating activities during the day.

Q. Okay. And what happens when they come back, do they submit a report to you or where does it go?

A. Not just me, to the supervisors that are involved. We update tickets and pass it along to repairs or something that needs further investigation we prepare it for the next shift.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: John, hold on a second. So specifically for the leak surveys?

MR. CHHATRE: Yes, sir.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Does the leak surveys go to you or go to someone else?

MR. LOBELLO: Leak surveys go to me.

MR. CHHATRE: Okay. That's what I was asking you, what happened to the leak --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Survey.

MR. CHHATRE: I believe leak survey is the correct word (indiscernible).

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Survey work.

MR. CHHATRE: Survey work.

MR. LOBELLO: Survey work.

MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

MR. LOBELLO: You want to know about the survey work?

MR. CHHATRE: Yes. Yes, sir.

MR. LOBELLO: Okay. Manhattan's divided into three different basic areas and has to be surveyed in a nine month cycle. Okay. I prepared maps for the crews to go out at the midnight hours because it's conducive to sounding.

They'll come back, show me any information, any locations that they picked up, and if there is I go back with my equipment, which is a little more sophisticated, and I correlate the water mains. I try to locate the source of a problem if there

is a problem.

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. Okay. If they don't see any noise, then does it come to you?

A. Yeah. No, if it's not picked up within the survey there's no reason -- then it's fine.

Q. Okay, okay. So please walk us through. If leak survey comes to you for a potential leak or possible noise, what happens next?

A. Okay. Well, they'll come back with a sheet that they went out with and they'll have a list of locations if they picked up sound. I go back, I take each location and I recheck the sound. If I feel that it's a true leak sound, I correlate the main. If there's a problem within the main, I could -- I normally pinpoint the problem, I'll mark out a location for repairs. They come dig it up and if there's a problem they do the repairs on that problem.

Q. Okay. You know, you do it more often and we are not familiar with it, so please walk us through.

A. Sure.

Q. How you go about once you know a location that there's a possibility of a noise or leak?

A. Well, once there's sound on the water main, I attach my equipment. It's a correlator, has two sensors. I try to straddle where I think the problem is at and it correlates the distance

between both sounding points and it actually pinpoints where the problem is emanating from.

Q. Could you for me go into a little more detail? When you say you straddle it, you go to two different mains, how do you do that?

A. What kind of detail? Well, I attach a sensor to a mainline gate valve.

Q. Okay.

A. I attach the sensor to say a hydrant gate valve and now you have a distance between those two. I measure the distance, I input it to my computer, it does a correlation between the sound it's picking up between two points and it actually comes up with a footage from one of those points. Say the distance is 200 feet, it will tell me its 100 feet from Point A.

So I'll go to that point, I'll measure it out. I'll do a little further investigation. I'll check services, I'll ground sound. And if I'm confident, I mark a location over the water main and I submit a work order for repairs to come and dig that location up.

Q. Okay. And you can do that with one person only?

A. I'd rather have a team but -- you know, most times I do but a lot of times I go out -- it's fairly simple, I could do it myself.

Q. Yourself. And your hours are? Your crew works from; we were told like 12:00 to 8:00?

A. Well, its 24/7 -- you know, it's constant.
Q. So you are in the office?
A. No, I'm out in the field. I'm out in the field. My shift is during the day.
Q. Okay. So you will do this work during the day or --
A. During the day and if they need me, they do it at night. And there are other supervisors who are familiar with the equipment and if they need be, they go out and do their own correlation.
Q. Okay.
A. But more than likely they call me. I've been doing it for quite a while.
Q. Okay. And describe the equipment a little bit, how did it work?
A. You know, the sound -- our water mains -- the water should run through our water mains silent, okay. Anytime there's a disturbance in the water main it's going to create a sound. Now, these sensors pick up that sound and it transmits -- each sensor, what I have attached to a valve or a hydrant or other valves will transmit the sound to my base station, okay. And it's picking up the sound and it does a mathematical form -- equation and formula. I'm not -- you know, I'm not --
Q. Understand.
A. -- you know, familiar with how it actually does it but it does it and pinpoints where the source of the leak is.

Q. It's the computer program itself so you don't (indiscernible) anybody to anything?

A. Exactly. I just input data, the material, material to the main, the distance, different segments that might be involved. There could be a 12 inch main going into a six inch main or 20 inch main going into a 12 inch main. I have to input all that data and it has to be accurate to get an accurate location. That's what I do.

Q. And that's what it is?

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay. And do you have to calibrate any of the instrumentation with whatever you listen to or any of that stuff?

A. Yeah. We send the equipment to get calibrated every couple of years.

Q. Okay. Is that a manufacturer requirement or you can just do that as a practice or is it --

A. We do it as a practice.

Q. There is no protocol or procedure then that requires you to do that?

A. No, no.

Q. And how accurate is the machine?

A. Accurate.

Q. I mean, has it happened to you that --

A. Well, it depends -- you know, it depends how severe the situation is. The bigger the leak, the greater the leak, the more

accurate it is because we work on sound. If there's no sound usually there's no leak -- you know, and we pick up sound. And if it's a good leak, if it's a water main break, I'm pretty accurate.

Q. Without having to see water?

A. Without having to see -- I've found leaks that have been ongoing for years and I get to location, I pick up sound, I pinpoint the leak and usually it's there.

MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: All right. Ravi, can I check on a question that might be appropriate?

MR. CHHATRE: Sure. No, go ahead.

BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

Q. In terms of -- in your experience, John.

A. Sure.

Q. You said you've been doing this for how many years?

A. 29 years.

Q. 29 years. Do you typically see when they have your larger leaks that it's not coming up in the street? In my end of the business we have what's called reading the street. You might see a depression in the street.

A. Right, right.

Q. And do you typically find that sometimes we have a depression and then you have a sound that correlates somehow?

A. Sure, sure -- you know, normally if I get an indication and I walk it off and I see a depression, I know it's probably --

Q. Kind of validates?
A. Yeah, one or the other, yeah.
Q. Okay.
UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Ravi.
MR. CHHATRE: Go ahead.
UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Was the depression over where the leak was?
MR. LOBELLO: I'm sorry?
UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Was the depression over where the leak was?
MR. LOBELLO: Which one?
UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Well, what he said, if you found a leak and if you correlate it to a depression, is the depression over the leak or --
MR. LOBELLO: Sometimes it could be near the leak -- you know, it could be washing away as -- you know, on the ground you don't know what's happening on the ground, could be washing the soil away maybe 10 feet away.
And what I normally do is I'll ground sound. I have another piece of equipment that amplifies the sound too, I just place it over the main and I'll walk it, and if it's a good leak I could hear it so I'll --
BY MR. CHHATRE:
Q. On that machine, not your computer that (indiscernible)?
A. No, this is a different instrument.

Q. Okay.
A. And I could usually -- I'll like narrow in my mock out to get -- I'd rather not see our repair end dig multiple holes.
Q. Yeah.
A. I want to be certain that they're over the leak.
Q. And what is it that your computer equipment is called?
A. I use digicorr, it's called a digicorr.
Q. How do you spell it?
A. D-I-G-I-C-O-R-R.
MR. CHHATRE: Okay.
UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Is that the first device you described or the (indiscernible)?
MR. LOBELLO: That's the correlator.
UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: All right.
MR. LOBELLO: That's the scanning equipment.
BY MR. CHHATRE:
Q. And do you know who the manufacturer is?
A. Fluid FCS.
Q. FCS?
A. FCS, Fluid Conservation Systems.
Q. Okay. Thank you. And the second instrument, what is that called?
A. Well, a ground mike.
Q. You put on the ground and --
A. It's called an L-Mic.

Q. How do you spell that?
A. Just an L-Mic.
Q. Okay. And what is by?
A. Same company.
Q. Okay. And L-Mic, how often do you have to calibrate that?
A. That doesn't need to be calibrated because it's just a sensor.
Q. Okay.
A. And an operator handle and --
Q. I don't know why I was looking at it like the sensor goes bad or --
A. Well, you'll know.
Q. You'll know?
A. You know, it creates a sound and -- a static sound and -- you know.
Q. Okay.
A. It has to be handled gently because there are crystals in these sensors and you can't drop it. You've got to be really -- you know, careful with the actual equipment we use.
Q. (Indiscernible) asking for calibration (indiscernible)?
A. Right. That's nothing you calibrate.
Q. Just (indiscernible) works or (indiscernible)?
A. It's either it works or it don't work.
Q. Okay, okay.

A. And you've got to make sure it's charged.
Q. Okay. Is it battery operated?
A. Battery operated, correct.
Q. Both units are battery operated?
A. Yes.
Q. Now, will the first unit said correlator, is that what you call it?
A. That's what I -- that's the scanning process, yeah.
Q. All right. That correlator, will it see the leaks only on the main or it will see leaks in the service lines also?
A. You have to be -- you have to know how to read it, okay. If will bring you to the T -- you know, if it's a service line it's tapped off on main, when you scan that main, that water main, it's going to bring you to that T -- you know, and you could be off a foot or two if it's a service line leak because the leak could very well be like 30, 40 feet away from the water main, but it's actually bringing you to the T.

And then if there's a curb valve, I utilize that too. I sometimes scan from the curb valve to the main line gate valve to try to pinpoint -- to see if the leak's on a valve on a service line.

Q. So how do you connect those two points?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah, that's what I'm trying -- that was my question, I'm having a hard time visualizing that.

MR. CHHATRE: Right.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Is it actually a probe or is it wireless?

MR. LOBELLO: No, its wireless. Everything's wireless.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay. So you place one probe here and then you place another probe here?

MR. LOBELLO: Yeah, and they are 10 attachments to it. It transmits to the base station.

MR. CHHATRE: So they are both transmitters, you say?

MR. LOBELLO: Yeah. The sensors are both transmitters, right --

MR. CHHATRE: Now, I understand.

MR. LOBELLO: -- to my base station, which is a computer and it receives a transmission from both those points.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Quick question, how new is that technology?

MR. LOBELLO: How new?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

MR. LOBELLO: There are many generations of it -- you know.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay.

MR. LOBELLO: It started off 29 years ago. We were running wires.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Well, that's my question then.

MR. LOBELLO: We were running wires until --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

MR. LOBELLO: -- and then it became more sophisticated and now it just transmits.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible).

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. Now, the computer, does it store the data?

A. I could store it, if need be, but I'm scanning constantly so there's no need for me to store anything.

Q. Okay. No, I mean, only where you see the leak can you store those?

A. You could. Actually I guess you could store it in the hard drive within the computer but --

Q. The (indiscernible), I mean?

A. Yeah, but I don't -- you know.

Q. You don't store them?

A. I scan millions of locations.

Q. Okay. You don't have millions of leaks?

A. Oh.

Q. You do, okay.

A. In 29 years I've found many a leak.

Q. Okay. Now, on the service lines, how accurate is --

A. It's a little more difficult with service lines. Again, because depending on where it's broken on the service line, if it's closer to the water main it's -- you know, the vibration is -- you know, it's picked up easily on the water main. But if it's within a long span, you might not hear it, it might not be a big

leak.

Q. And what is the smallest leak your machine can detect? I mean, can you -- a pinhole leak, for example?

A. I'm sorry?

Q. Can it detect a pinhole leak on the water main?

A. It depends.

Q. I'm sorry.

A. It depends on how much pressure there is. Again, it's the vibration of the water main. Any kind of -- if it's a pinpoint, pinhole leak, if it creates -- if it's on a smaller main, like say an eight inch or six inch, it's going -- you're going to pick it up.

Q. You will?

A. Yeah. The smaller the main the easier it is to pick up.

Q. Okay.

A. As the main gets larger you're talking about 48's and 36, it's difficult, so you have to be closer within range when you scan, you don't want to scan 300 feet, 400 feet -- you know, on a 20, 36, 48 inch main. You want to get close. You want to scan to 50, 100 feet and try to (indiscernible).

Q. And do you do that?

A. Yes, I do.

Q. How can you do that between the two (indiscernible)?

A. Shorten the scan. I'll have a repair crew come to location, we'll make a test cut to -- you know, I'll probe down,

hit the main and I shorten the scan.

Q. So two (indiscernible) closer?

A. It's closer together. The shorter the distance the more accurate you're going to be.

Q. Okay. So are there guidelines that says pipelines more than 12 inches or 14 inches --

A. No, there's no guidelines.

Q. (Indiscernible)?

A. Outside New York City you could -- you've got crews that are scanning four or five, 800 feet and still be accurate.

Q. Okay. So what makes the limitation on New City?

A. There's a lot of interference. You've got a lot -- you get interference from the subway system, traffic, skyscrapers who have pumps. It will sound like a leak and -- you know, you have to go into the building, tell them to shut their pumps off so you don't get that draw, that pull from the buildings, from my water main it sounds like a water leak. You get Con Ed high pressure gas mains, sometimes they're touching, it creates a sound.

Q. Okay. The lines are touching together?

A. Sometimes, sometimes.

Q. Okay.

A. Happens many a times.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You tell me (indiscernible).

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So the question is, is the gas main touching the water main or water main touching the gas line?

MR. LOBELLO: Which came first?
UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Who owns the street?
MR. CHHATRE: (Indiscernible).
UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Not necessarily, not necessarily.
MR. CHHATRE: Utilities there first.
UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: City of New York.
UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: There's undermining going on at all?
UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Compresses.
BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. Okay. All right. Now, are you saying it's pretty accurate on the main that you can detect even a pinhole leak on the main, or a small (indiscernible) on the pipe?

A. Uh-huh. Again, it depends on how severe it is. If it's being forced out in the vibrating main, I pick it up.

Q. Pick it up, okay. And you said earlier that you had detected some leaks which are going on for years. Can you give me an example? I mean, how do you know the leak is going on for years, I guess that's a better question?

A. Well, the building or homeowner that's been having the problem for 10 years all of a sudden doesn't have the problem anymore because I located it.

Q. Okay. But, I mean, your survey every nine -- I mean, the whole area has to be surveyed in nine months, right?

A. Every nine months, correct.

Q. So how can you -- with the equipment, how can you miss that, I guess my question is? If something's accurate, how can you miss something and can go on and months after months after month?

A. Prior to me working in Manhattan only I was doing the whole city.

Q. Whole entire city?

A. So, yeah, so --

Q. Whole five boroughs?

A. The five boroughs. So I'm talking about it could have been a location in Brooklyn, it could have been a location in Queens and could -- you know.

Q. So you could not get to it for a few years?

A. And the other boroughs, the cycle is a lot longer. It could be 30 -- every 36 months, it could be every 12 months like certain parts of Queens, Brooklyn, cycles longer.

Q. And have you done any work on Park Avenue or going on the second time for leaks?

A. What do you mean?

Q. If your first crew goes and they hear a noise, then only you go to either confirm or do --

A. Right, if they come up with sound I'll go and recheck it.

Q. Okay. Now, how would you know if they missed something?

A. I wouldn't know. They're doing the survey. They're

given an area; they have to check every valve on every corner of that. They usually do between 45 and 70,000 linear feet when they do the survey.

Q. A week, a year or --

A. No, when they go out for that shift.

Q. Okay. Each shift?

A. Yeah. They're walking to every corner, sounding every valve, going to the next corner, sounding every valve. If they pick up sound they jot it down and if they don't pick up sound they don't jot anything down.

Q. And what is their equipment called?

A. What's that?

Q. What is their equipment called?

A. It's another -- they could use an L-Mic or it's called an SS20, which is a survey box, and it's a similar concept -- it's a sensor with a headset and it just amplifies the sound that it's hearing when they sound the hydrant, when they sound the valve, with the T bar, I think the earlier guys -- they were probers.

They have to hit metal on metal knowing they're on -- making contact with the valve. They attach, they put the sensor on top and they listen to it. And if there's sound, again, they jot it down. If there's no sound they walk to the next corner and they sound two or three valves that are in that intersection.

Q. Can you tell us how that sound sounds like?

A. It's like when you turn on a facet and it's -- and the

facet water is spraying out. That's sort of like it sounds.

Q. What it sounds like. And how does your equipment sound like? Your equipment sounds like -- your equipment just gives you a profile?

A. No, it sounds too.

Q. So you're not listening to sound when you're using your equipment?

A. No, I'm listening to sound because I have to make sure that they're truly listening to water sound or leak sound.

Q. And how does your equipment sound like?

A Same thing.

Q. Same thing.

A. Same concept.

Q. So for your crew that goes out and does the initial survey?

A. Everybody's involved in it. It's not my particular crew.

Q. Right.

A. The whole unit does it.

Q. Okay. And how are they trained?

A. It's just experience. It's just doing it daily day after day, you learn the different sounds.

Q. But, I mean, how do they get trained? Who teaches them?

A. It's by doing it every day.

Q. Okay. But I guess is, do you take somebody with you to

train them or who (indiscernible)?

A. Well, if they're with me and they have questions on sound, and they'll let me listen, I say, okay, this is not a sound, this is traffic going by. If it's not steady it's -- a leak sound is steady, it's constant. You can hear the same sound throughout. If there's a break between sounds you know you're not picking up a leak sound, you could be picking up a train going by or traffic going by.

And I instill in these guys, you have to wait, you have to listen and just make sure it's the same tone throughout and it's a distinct sound and you know the difference between you're hearing electrical static or a pump sound and mechanicals, you know there's a difference and that's something they get used to by doing it every day or try to do it every day.

Q. And at what time they are qualified to go by themselves, the new employees?

A. Well, usually there's an experienced guy in the crew -- you know, you don't send out three guys that don't know what they're doing. There's usually one person that's been doing it for years and he's listening to the sounds.

Q. Right. But at what time these people can go independently (indiscernible)?

A. There's no independently, they go as a team. There's three in a crew.

Q. Okay.

A. One probes, one sounds and the other one protects them out in the middle.

Q. Okay.

A. You're in the middle of the street, you're blocking a gate, you've got to make sure they don't get hit by traffic.

Q. And in your procedure is there a quality assurance check that you randomly go to location with the (indiscernible) no sound at all or no leaks, and then you just go in there to confirm that with your equipment and your experience and, yep, indeed there is no leak?

A. No, how could I do that? That's the whole -- this is the whole city you're talking about. Daily I'm busy doing complaint work.

Q. I'm not saying why you do it.

A. Yeah, I'm not checking up on them.

Q. I'm not that.

A. I'm just confident in the fact that they're doing their job and they're coming back with either sound or no sound.

Q. Okay.

A. And so if they come back with no sound -- you know, I'm confident in the fact that they did their assigned work and they came up with no sound.

Q. Okay. So I guess the answer is there is no cross check procedure?

A. No, no.

Q. Okay. Sorry. Have you ever been on Park Avenue? I asked (indiscernible).

A. I've been all over the city, Park Avenue.

Q. With your follow-up survey?

A. With trying to locate leaks, yeah.

Q. Okay. Do you remember anything on Park Avenue that you have found leaks or no leaks or anything in Park Avenue, I would say probably 2011 onwards?

A. I'm sure I've been on Park Avenue and found leaks.

MR. CHHATRE: No, no, I'm not saying that.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Park Avenue goes -- crosses all of Manhattan so --

MR. CHHATRE: Okay, okay, between 116th and 117th Street East on the map right here, I mean?

MR. LOBELLO: Yeah, yeah, I know there. Well, after this happened -- you know, I went back there, again, because you had the fire department and everybody involved there, they were attached to hydrants, they broke hydrants. They were shutting valves so things were leaking --

MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

MR. LOBELLO: -- after all of this was happening. So I went back to make sure there was no other problems in the area.

MR. CHHATRE: We were told on March 9th, was it, actually that there was a survey done in this region and that (indiscernible) was really --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: March 5th, I think it was.

MR. CHHATRE: Really, March --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I think that's what the record shows.

MR. CHHATRE: March, yeah, March 15th?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: 5.

MR. CHHATRE:

Q. March 5, okay. Yeah, okay. So were you aware of that?

A. Yeah, they were assigned an area and I'm assuming it included this section --

Q. (Indiscernible).

A. The night they did that survey and they came up with nothing.

Q. The reason I'm asking you, the people who actually supposedly conducted that, they didn't remember. So I was just wondering whether you remembered?

A. Yeah, well, we only remembered because we went back on our records --

Q. Okay.

A. -- and I looked at the survey work that was done. And I give limits of the maps that are being issued and they have to do those limits. And this area fell between those limits.

Q. Okay.

A. I looked at -- there was no sound being detected, there was no street leaks because they jot those down too. If they see

a street leak they'll jot it down and they'll come back.

Q. Okay.

A. And there was nothing, nothing so --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Can you explain what a street leak is for us?

MR. LOBELLO: As they're going about their business sounding valves, if they see water coming from a curb or water coming over from the street -- you know, that's a street leak. So they'll jot -- and if it looks like it's coming from a water main, they'll jot it down.

And when it's something like that, when there's an actual leak, I go there right away and try to get -- try to pick up the source of that leak.

BY MR. CHHATRE:

Q. And do you know the name of the crew that went to do the survey on March 5th?

A. Yeah, it was Eric Acosta.

Q. Okay. I guess my question is, do you remember?

A. Yeah. Well, I don't remember them actually doing this particular survey.

Q. No, no --

A. But, yeah, I know who the crew is.

Q. (Indiscernible) was there an experienced person in that crew?

A. Yeah, Christopher Roan (ph.) he came from the unit --

you know, before they put us in individual boroughs we were all in one unit and we handled the whole city. He was one of my laborers.

Q. Okay.

A. He has multiple years, 15, 20 years, so I know he knows sound.

Q. Okay.

A. And so when he goes -- and he's on that shift. He's on the night shift, so basically they rely on him to bounce things back and forth -- you know, if they're picking up sound or if he's doing the sounding, it's pretty -- you know, it's pretty -- if he heard noise he would put it down.

MR. CHHATRE: That's all I have. Thanks.

BY MR. EMEABA:

Q. Okay. So you are a supervisor?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Okay. How many people do you have working under you?

A. Well, how many -- I don't know -- how many people are on my yard.

Q. Okay. So, no, you cannot just account for maybe three people that work there (indiscernible)?

A. No, no, no, absolutely. I don't primarily do leak detection work. It's just something that I've been doing it for a long time and I'm good at it. But I do -- I have the responsibility of other supervisors. I do shutdowns; I help with

investigations and whatnot. So I do the gamut of all that's involved.

Q. Okay. You do the survey yourself or people do it for you?

A. People do it for me.

Q. Okay. So every information you get is not because you are involved directly --

A. Right.

Q. -- it's because of what you have been informed?

A. Right.

Q. Okay. The people that perform the survey for you, is this a scheduled survey or a routine one? How does it come? You mentioned nine months, something like that.

A. It's not scheduled as a routine when we can do it. It has to be done. It was -- at one time it was federally mandated that we do it a certain amount of times during the years. Like Manhattan is high profile, it's every nine months.

Q. Okay.

A. And so it has to be done on a continuous basis. So, you know, within certain timeframes. So you have to make sure it's done within those timeframes.

Q. Okay. When you had the federal mandate, how long ago was that?

A. I don't know the logistics. I don't know the background and how it's done or when it's done or if it's even done anymore.

I know its common practice. It's a good practice to have to maintain the system so they kept doing it. I don't know when it ended or if it's even ended.

Q. Okay. How many people work under your survey group?

A. Again, there's no survey group. It's the whole yard. It's the 38th Street yard. It's every individual involved in that building is doing this work.

Q. Okay. I know we've -- you know, spoken --

A. There's not a particular -- okay, you, you, you are going to do survey and be on a survey team and that's it. Everybody's involved. Everybody has to learn how to determine sound, how to pick up sound. Everybody has to be accustomed to it.

Q. Okay. All right. (Indiscernible) the initial people that go out. You used three words but I think for it to be narrowed down we'll used the word investigation, we'll use the word detection, we'll use the word survey. And survey stands by itself, correct?

A. Right.

Q. Okay. Investigation, what is that? Is that initial, (indiscernible) or what is that?

A. An investigation -- when they survey and they come up with sound then I do an investigation. I go to each individual location where they said they picked up sound, I do my investigation. I'll check the area; I'll check all the valves.

If there's more than one main I'll check those mains.

If I'm picking up sound, which they jotted down. If I'm picking up similar sound, I continue my investigation. I scan the water main. I'll check buildings, check utilities, make sure they're not getting flooded out.

If I get a location to dig, which is -- it's picking up a leak -- I'll mark it out and then I'll send it over to our repair end who come and dig it up.

Q. Okay. So you don't do survey but you do investigation yourself?

A. Yeah.

Q. So you're involved in going to the field yourself?

A. Yeah, I'm always out in the field.

Q. Okay. And apart from you performing the work, do any other person perform the investigation aspect of it, which is kind of supplementing the survey that had been done?

A. You mean, does anyone do what I do?

Q. Yes.

A. Yeah, the people are being trained to do it. Other supervisors are being trained to do it.

Q. How many people do you have that do the investigation?

A. There are three supervisors during the day. They're being trained to work the equipment.

Q. And how many during the night?

A. 4:00 to 12:00 there's two supervisors; midnight shift

there's two supervisors.

Q. Okay.

A. They've taken classes on our equipment.

Q. Okay. Survey was done on Park Avenue, correct?

A. Correct.

Q. Okay. What did they find?

A. They found nothing.

Q. All right. So you never had to go there to do an investigation on it?

A. What do you have to investigate if there's nothing?

Q. Okay. Close to Park Avenue area, was a street or road -- -

A. That had sound?

Q. That had sound?

A. No. Again, that sheet they went out -- that map came back with nothing so that whole area, which is a good size area, its plus 40, 50,000 linear feet, they checked and they didn't come up with anything.

Q. Okay. The other individuals who also conduct investigations, were they specifically trained to conduct investigation or did they grow into it with passage of time on the job?

A. We all grow into it.

Q. Okay. Are there some manuals you have to read in order to --

A. Sure, we have manuals with the equipment, yes.
Q. Okay. And there is also a certification program?
A. There's no certification programs.
Q. Okay. Who satisfied the fact that this individual is qualified to do the survey and also to do the investigation?
A. Who determines?
Q. Yes, who determines (indiscernible)?
A. When I started I might not have been good. As I've gained experience I got better. How do you determine this person's good and that person's not good unless you continuously work at it like anything else?
Q. Okay. When somebody becomes a survey person who goes out first --
A. Right.
Q. -- and if they come back with sound --
A. Okay.
Q. -- then you the Investigator come back later?
A. Right.
Q. All right. How do you verify the effectiveness of that individual?
A. It's not my place to. Well, they've got evaluations. Every year there's evaluations on individuals. If they're not performing up to par they get a poor evaluation. If they're doing well they get a good evaluation.
Q. And when you say not performing, means you did not pick

up more sound?

A. No, it has nothing to do with sound. It's their work performance.

Q. No, I'm talking about specifically on this issue of going out for survey, conducting survey, and being able to look at sound or not to look at a sound to be sure it's been done properly. So who -- how is that effectiveness or what they are doing -- their work performance being assessed? How do you determine that?

A. When at times they come back with multiple locations of sound and that happens all the time, they come back with multiple locations of sound. I go out there and I listen to it just to -- you know, I'm going to verify it's a leak sound.

And multiple times they've come back with good indications and problems that haven't arose yet, and I get to location and I'll find the source of a problem before it gets to a point where it's collapsing -- you know, the roadway or it's going into buildings and flooding out buildings.

We try to nip those problems early before it gets to that degree. So I know these crews, they've come back with work for me to follow through on and they've come back with me with no work, that they didn't pick up sound. They can't make up sound.

And if they have a question about a sound, they'll jot it down anyway and I'll go back and I'll listen. I say, okay, what you were hearing was a sound but it wasn't a leak sound, it

was a motorized sound. It was an electrical interference somewhere. And I'll try to explain to them the difference in sounds. But more times than not, they come back with true sound.

Q. Okay. Have you had a situation of after survey had been done by the (indiscernible) group and somebody of your caliber or another person goes out to do the complimentary sound investigation --

A. Follow-up.

Q. -- follow-up and you spotted, marked an area, and it was dug open and nothing was found?

A. Sure, sure.

Q. Can you tell me more about it, what happened? What could lead to that situation?

A. It could have been an interior problem where they had something going on within the building and it's drawing that water from the main and it's causing (indiscernible) appears to be a leak. And when I mark something out they'll dig it and it might be a tap and there's nothing wrong with the tap, there's nothing wrong with the line, it's just that there's a lot of uses within the building and it's not a leak.

So, you know, our crews will just backfill it and we'll just say scratch it off as an internal problem, a usage problem and not a leak problem.

MR. EMEABA: All right. I rest my case for now. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You rest your case, Counselor.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Could I ask a couple of questions, Ravi?

MR. CHHATRE: Okay, sure.

BY MR. GEORGELIS:

Q. Anastasios Georgelis for the record. John, the survey crews, who signed the survey for them to go out that day?

A. I prepare it for them. I know if we're doing North River, I know North River section has to be completed, so I have maps that are bordered and areas that have to be done, so I'll set it up for the night crews to do.

Q. So let's talk about this specific location, Park Avenue between 116th and 117th Street.

A. Okay.

Q. Do you know what district or what zone that falls in?

A. I believe that's North River.

Q. Okay. And then sometime after the building collapses, I think I requested you pull some records on that location?

A. Right.

Q. And what did you find?

A. I found they were there a couple weeks beforehand and that area was surveyed and there was nothing found.

Q. Okay. Did you go back any further than that?

A. Yes. A couple more cycles before that too and nothing was ever -- nothing found, I believe.

Q. Wasn't found in that block --
A. On that block.
Q. -- or in the area at all?
A. In that block, on that block.
Q. Were there sounds found in that area?
A. I don't remember. I don't recall but it could -- they could have found a leaky hydrant gate or a leaky mainline gate somewhere within the vicinity.
Q. Okay. So that's good. So they go out and you call to the survey box?
A. It's a sounding box.
Q. All right. So what does it look like? Just describe it.
A. It's just a headset with a sensor that's attached to a cable that goes to a small rectangular box that has a meter on it and it picks up decibels so --
Q. Decibels?
A. Decibels.
Q. So you have to attach that onto the pipe itself?
A. No, it's a magnet attached to the sensor and we have a T bar. It's like a six foot bar that you probe through the manhole covers. You hit the valve and then you just place it on the T bar and just listen from that point.
Q. So either you would attach it to the main itself or a piece of metal that's attached to the pipe?

A. Exactly or if there's no valves in the area we'll sound the hydrant itself. We'll just -- without -- we'll just put the sensor right on the hydrant.

Q. The sound that you hear on this box the same as what you hear on the correlator or is it different?

A. No, it's not as sensitive as my correlator.

Q. Okay. So have you ever used that survey box?

A. Yeah, sure.

Q. So describe to me what kind of leaks? You've found leaks in the past?

A. Yes.

Q. All right. So using the survey box, what kind of leaks have you found?

A. I find between water main breaks to service line leaks to joint leaks to packing leaks.

Q. So let's talk about the water main breaks that you found -- circular breaks, longitudinal breaks?

A. Longitudinal breaks create tremendous sound so that's -- I could pick that up easily. Circular breaks the same thing, creates vibration -- like I said, creates vibration on the water main which I could easily pick up.

Q. So let's go to that. So now if you were on the valve that was on the corner and there was a circular break on the main --

A. I'll pick it up.

Q. So what would you say, you definitely -- anyone would be able to hear it or --

A. Yeah, well, yeah, depending on -- again, depending on how severe the break was. Depending on if it's a complete circular, you're going to hear it unless it's just starting and it's just very lightly coming out of it, you're not going to hear it, because it's not forcibly existing the main.

Q. So what you're -- so if you had a complete circular break it would be hard to miss?

A Hard to miss.

Q. Is that what you're saying? Now, would it make a difference how far away you were from the valve?

A. It does. The closer you are to the valve the louder the sound's going to be.

Q. So from your experience, if you had a circular break on a 12 inch water main, 200 feet away you'd pick it up?

A. 200 feet I could probably accurately get a location to pick up.

Q. We're talking about the survey box.

A. The survey box, I could hear it -- 200 feet away, yeah, yeah, I've done that, yeah. 100 feet, 150 feet I could hear it.

Q. Do you have any reason that you would think that this crew wouldn't be doing their survey work accurately?

A. I'm sure they're doing what they're assigned to do.

MR. GEORGELIS: Okay.

MR. CHHATRE: (Indiscernible)?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I don't have any questions for him.

MR. CHHATRE: Frank?

MR. MCCARTON: I'm good.

BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

Q. Yeah, a couple questions for you, John. So you talked about training and procedures. Can you tell me the kind of training you get through your career to get to the level of technical competency you got to? Is there formal training, classroom training, manufacturers' training?

A. Manufacturers' training. Initially when we get new equipment they give us -- it comes with training. It's a week's worth of training. But basically our training is on-the-job -- you know, like I said, we were a unit independent. We would -- scanning five, six, seven times a day with surveying every day. So the sound -- we got familiar with the sound quick -- rather quickly.

Q. In terms of procedures, do you have written procedures that tell you step by step what to do or is it, again, intrinsically to the job that you learn over time?

A. Learn over time.

Q. Okay. You said somewhere in one of the conversations that you were doing it a long time, you're good. And to kind of piggyback on what Kelly talked about, how do you measure good?

How do you know you're good?

I guess maybe I'll phrase the question a little bit differently. Your crews come back and they over a months period they give you 100 indications of sounds, right? How many of those mature to be actual leaks? Is it all 100, is it 50 percent, is it 10 percent?

A. I can't give a percentage but obviously not all the sound as they come are true leak sounds.

Q. Right.

A. You know, there are times when they come with a list of locations and that list pans out to be nothing.

Q. Right. Okay. So now you go out and you --

A. I double check and recheck the sounds, what they were picking up and --

Q. Right. So you go out and you do a double check and you say, what is your hit rate? So you go out and you say, I qualify with 100, 50 of them I have a strong belief is a water --

A. My mock (ph.) outs?

Q. Yeah.

A. I've got to give a percentage of my mock outs?

Q. I'm just saying.

A. I don't know.

Q. I used to do pinpointing years ago and I -- you know, I used to be tracked on accuracy.

A. You know what, talk to Zee and ask Zee.

Q. Who's that? Zee Gillette (ph.).
A. Zee from (indiscernible).
Q. Zee, I've worked for Zee many years ago.
A. Yeah, you know.
Q. On an average, I mean, do you have a feel for what your accuracy is?
A. 95 percent.
Q. 95 percent of the time you're right?
A. I'm pretty accurate.
Q. Okay. Of the other five percent, is there a chance that you could miss something and it comes back as an actual water leak?
A. When I miss then I have to go back.
Q. All right.
A. Just like recently I marked out a location, they dug it up, found nothing. So I had to go back and further my investigation and try to narrow it down.
Q. No, I mean it the other way. What you're saying is there's a sound that's detected, you go there and say it's nothing, but then it matures into -- you know, an actual water leak?
A. Not that I know of.
Q. Do you get -- you said you do other investigations besides leak survey. Do you get referrals like from other agencies to go out and -- let's say there's a potential sinkhole

in the street, do you get a referral from DOT to go out and do an investigation? Do you do those kinds of work?

A. Well, they asked me -- DOT asked me to go out -- you know, my unit sends me out -- you know, my district supervisor will send me out to check this cave-in, check this sinkhole, check out water mains to make sure they're sound and make sure we're not causing that sinkhole.

Q. Right.

A. And I do that too.

Q. Would you be -- would you have been the one to do that in Manhattan if there was something, let's say, reported by the DOT on Park Avenue between 116th and 117th? Would you have records of that and/or a recollection of that?

A. I know that area and I was never there to check a sinkhole or a depression or anything.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That's all I have for now.

MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Chris?

MR. STOLICKY: (Indiscernible).

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Just quick.

MR. CHHATRE: Go ahead.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So the survey box, before you start using, how do you know you didn't do your whole night's survey work and the box wasn't working?

MR. LOBELLO: It's easy. When they press the button, if it says low battery, know it's time to change the battery. If

there's something going on with the sensor, if the sensor went bad, it will create a static sound and every time you press the button you have that static sound. You can't do a survey with that so --

BY MR. STOLICKY:

Q. Chris Stolicky. It's kind of a technical question, but with these sounding devices, is the sound vibration going through the water media itself or is it in the metal part of the --

A. Metal part, metal part.

Q. Okay. So if there's a -- I mean, New York City has hard water as we saw from the main break on Park Avenue there was a lot of sediment on the bottom of that pipe. To me it was a lot. There might be more in other pipes and its all metals and everything else. Could that shorten the length of how far that sound would travel, the vibration just because it's broken up but it's still heavy material in the pipe?

Based on your experience, I mean, I don't know how many open pipes you've seen doing this.

A. I've not seen many but I know depending on, again, how severe the leak is, the pipe's going to vibrate. The smaller the main the sounds going to travel and it's easy to pick up. You're going to pick up sound. You might not -- that sediment might interfere with the correlation part -- you know, because it's -- that's part of the formula, the volume and the flow and all that.

Q. (Indiscernible).

A. And it might interfere with the correlation part but we always know there's something going on. And if I miss then I go back and -- you know, now it's -- the span is shortened because now they've got a hole open for me and I can work off from that point to shorten the span. And usually the second time around I could more accurately pinpoint the problem.

Q. Okay.

A. But we know something's going on.

Q. Going to be more accurate when you have the pipe visible and you can get (indiscernible)?

A. Well, absolutely. If the pipe's exposed I can put my sensor right on it and do it that way. It's the best way to scan a water main.

Q. Okay. So have you seen many water pipes after they've leaked or do you just find the leak and let another group come in and fix it and you move on?

A. Yeah, pretty much that's what, unless they call, they need me back and I'll come back.

Q. So they get to do the dirty work then?

A. Yes, that's the good thing, good part of it, yeah.

MR. STOLICKY: Okay. That's all I have. Thanks.

MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Matt.

MR. NICHOLSON: I've got nothing.

MR. CHHATRE: Nothing. Kelly.

MR. EMEABA: I'm okay.

MR. CHHATRE: Nobody have any questions? Thanks for coming and helping us out.

MR. LOBELLO: Thank you. Okay.

MR. CHHATRE: Off the record.

(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 DISTRIBUTION PIPELINE LEAK AND MULTISTORY STRUCTURE EXPLOSION IN HARLEM, NEW YORK MARCH 12, 2014 Interview of John Lobello
DOCKET NUMBER:	DCA-14-MP-002
PLACE:	New York, New York
DATE:	August 6, 2014

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.

_____

Cheryl Farner Donovan
Transcriber