

## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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NATURAL GAS DISTRIBUTION PIPELINE

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LEAK AND MULTISTORY STRUCTURE

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EXPLOSION IN HARLEM, NEW YORK

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MARCH 12, 2014

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Interview of: RAYMOND RISTAU

Consolidated Edison  
 4 Irving Place  
 New York, New York

Thursday,  
 August 7, 2014

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: RAVI CHHATRE  
 Investigator-in-Charge

## 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

FRANK McCARTON, Deputy Commissioner  
Office of Emergency Management  
New York, New York  
(Party Representative)

ANASTASIOS GEORGELIS, Director of Field Operations  
Bureau of Water and Sewer Operations  
Department of Environmental Protection  
New York, New York

LEONARD SINGH, Chief Engineer  
Gas Distribution Services  
Con Edison  
(Party Representative)

CHRIS STOLICKY, Utility Supervisor (Safety)  
New York State Department of Public Service  
(Party Representative)

THOMAS J. HALL, Esq.  
(Representative on behalf of Mr. Ristau)

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

1           MR. RISTAU: My name is Raymond Ristau, R-A-Y-M-O-N-D,  
2 R-I-S-T-A-U. I work for Hallen Construction, 5855 Queens Midtown  
3 Expressway, I think it is, in Maspeth. The person I choose to  
4 have with me is Hallen's lawyer, Mr. Hall.

5           MR. CHHATRE: Okay, thank you for that. Now I'll go  
6 around the room and have each person introduce themselves. Please  
7 state your name, spelling of your name, your title, and  
8 organization that you represent, starting from my right.

9           MR. NICOLSON: Matthew Nicholson, Investigator, NTSB.  
10 Spelled M-A-T-T-H-E-W, N-I-C-H-O-L-S-O-N;

11 [REDACTED]

12           MR. EMEABA: Kalu Kelly Emeaba, K-A-L-U, K-E-L-L-Y, E-M-  
13 E-A-B-A. I'm an investigator with NTSB. My e-mail address is

14 [REDACTED]

15           MR. McCARTON: My name's Frank McCarton. I'm a deputy  
16 commissioner in the Office of Emergency Management for the city of  
17 New York. I'm the New York City party rep on this investigation.  
18 My e-mail is [REDACTED].

19           MR. HALL: Thomas J. Hall, T-H-O-M-A-S, J, like James,  
20 H-A-L-L, Fabiani Cohen & Hall. That's F-A-B-I-A-N-I, Cohen, C-O-  
21 H-E-N, and Hall, H-A-L-L, LLP, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY  
22 10022. And I'm counsel for Hallen.

23           MR. SINGH: Leonard Singh, L-E-O-N-A-R-D, S-I-N-G-H, a  
24 chief engineer at gas distribution services, Con Edison; also the  
25 NTSB party rep on this investigation. [REDACTED]

1 MR. STOLICKY: Chris Stolicky from the New York --  
2 sorry, S-T-O-L-I-C-K-Y. I'm the New York party rep in this  
3 investigation. I'm a utility supervisor of safety, New York State  
4 Department of Public Service. E-mail address is

5 [REDACTED]

6 MR. CHHATRE: Thank you.

7 INTERVIEW OF RAYMOND RISTAU

8 BY MR. CHHATRE:

9 Q. Mr. Raymond, can you tell us your professional  
10 background, formal education, training, years of service with the  
11 construction company?

12 A. Well, like my high school and all that, start there? Or  
13 do you want me to just tell you --

14 Q. Yeah, I mean any background.

15 A. -- construction background?

16 Q. Formal education; high school is fine, and then what  
17 else you learned in your career, any training classes you took.

18 A. Well, you know, I have some college education. I was a  
19 motorcycle mechanic for roughly seven years. And I was a stock  
20 broker for roughly about seven years as well. After 9/11, I got  
21 into the construction business. That's when I started at Hallen.  
22 I've been there ever since. I started as a laborer. Basically on  
23 job training, worked my way up and I'm a foreman.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. I have my 10-hour OSHA class. I have a -- hazmat

1 training, 40 Hazwoper as well. And I guess that's really it.

2 Q. So as a foreman what do you do? As a foreman what are  
3 your responsibilities?

4 A. Well, I run a crew of roughly, at this point, three or  
5 four people, a machine dump truck. Basically I am excavating  
6 foreman. That's when I get a job, I go out, I check the job in  
7 reference to 753 markouts. We set the job up safe: barricades,  
8 columns, signs, and such like that, and we start excavation. I  
9 give job briefings to the men, tell them what we're doing and what  
10 I expect for the day.

11 Q. Now for the excavation, do you get -- the 811, are all  
12 the utilities marked? Who does that?

13 A. That was the 753 markout that I just spoke of.

14 Q. Okay, yeah. Do you remember doing any work on Park  
15 Avenue --

16 (Interruption at the door.)

17 BY MR. CHHATRE:

18 Q. Do you remember any work that you did on Park Avenue?

19 A. Prior to this whole investigation, I did not remember  
20 anything.

21 Q. Okay, how about 2011?

22 A. I'm saying prior to all this happening, I did not recall  
23 any -- you know, when someone told me about the explosion, I had  
24 no idea that I was ever in that area --

25 Q. In that area.

1           A.    -- yeah, until they brought it up to me.

2           Q.    Okay.  So you do not remember going in front of the  
3 building, doing any excavation, doing any backfilling or --

4           A.    Well, at this point, that we've spoken about it now, I  
5 recall some stuff.

6           Q.    Okay.

7           A.    But I'm saying prior to anyone -- when they said the  
8 building blew up over there, I never thought that I was even in  
9 there.

10          Q.    Okay.  So after the building blew up, after you heard  
11 it, do you remember -- did you think that, oh, maybe I have worked  
12 in that area, or you did not remember?

13          A.    No, not until the lawyers came to our building and we  
14 started talking about it, that I remember being there.  They said  
15 Hallen was there, but I did not remember.

16          Q.    You didn't remember.  If you don't remember, you don't  
17 remember, so --

18          A.    Well, I'm just saying, you know, now that we've spoken  
19 about the job, I mean, you know, it's a little refreshed, but --

20          Q.    Okay.  So what do you remember?

21          A.    Okay.  It basically was an encroachment.  There was a  
22 sewer contractor there prior to us being there.  So he had  
23 encroached on the gas main that was there.  I'm pretty sure when  
24 we originally got there, you know, he had a pretty deep hole.  I  
25 think, if I remember correctly, I think they actually backfilled



1 some of their hole so that we can come in and start our  
2 excavation, because they were pretty deep.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. You know? And then basically as far as that's  
5 concerned, I called into Layout. Typically they give you an A and  
6 B; you know, where to start and where to finish.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. Marks from like, let's say, 116th Street, if it is, it  
9 would say this far north of 116th Street, to connect there, and  
10 then connect at the other piece, an A and B location. And  
11 basically we excavated over the top of the main because it was  
12 going to be a same lane, if I remember correctly; take the old  
13 pipe out and put a new pipe in.

14 Q. So, you also take the old pipe out and put a new pipe  
15 in?

16 A. No, I don't do that. I only dig.

17 Q. Okay, you only dig.

18 A. I only excavate; that's it. I don't -- I'm not Con Ed  
19 qualified to do any type of mechanical work.

20 Q. So you only go and dig a trench?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. And do you meet the Con Ed person or whoever your  
23 contract person is at the site?

24 A. Yeah, typically there's an inspector on location.

25 Q. Before you start digging?

1           A.    Yeah.  Usually yeah.

2           Q.    Is there a meeting before you start digging that this is  
3 the location that we want you to dig?

4           A.    Well, we go over what we're planning for the day.  Sure.

5           Q.    Do you recall going over the plan with the Con Edison  
6 person, or?

7           A.    I don't even remember who the inspector was at that  
8 time, so I really couldn't say.

9           Q.    That is fine.  Do you remember if there were any other  
10 previous backfill before you started removing the dirt?

11          A.    Well, like I said, I'm pretty sure that the water guy,  
12 or the sewer, whoever he was, backfilled partial of his hole.  But  
13 as far as any patches or anything else on the street, at this  
14 point I really couldn't say.

15          Q.    But he didn't fill all the way up to the --

16          A.    No, he brought it up to a level at which we could work,  
17 which is, you know, less than 5 feet, so that we wouldn't need  
18 sheeting and such.  I'm pretty sure, but I couldn't -- but I don't  
19 think they finished their work before we did what we had to do,  
20 because the main was basically, you know, needed to be replaced.

21          Q.    Okay.  So do you remember seeing the main and remember  
22 seeing the main that was supposed to be replaced?

23          A.    Our gas main?

24          Q.    Yeah?

25          A.    I mean Con Ed's gas main?

1 Q. Yeah.

2 A. Yes, that's why I said we dug the trench on top of the  
3 gas main.

4 Q. Okay. But when you dug the trench, could you see the  
5 gas main?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Okay. And what did the soil look like? Do you  
8 remember?

9 A. What did it look like?

10 Q. Was it rocky? Was it clay? Was it a backfill material?

11 A. I know down near the 116th Street area where there was  
12 the plastic that we were connecting to, there was sand over there.  
13 As far as the rest of the trench, I'm sure it was just regular  
14 fill, you know, small rock and material like that. Nothing as far  
15 as big, you know, stones and things like that; we didn't pull  
16 anything like that out that I can recall.

17 Q. All right. That's all I have. Thank you.

18 MR. CHHATRE: Kelly?

19 BY MR. EMEABA:

20 Q. Good morning once again.

21 A. Good morning.

22 Q. From what you mention, okay, you are exposing on the  
23 main. What kind of main was that? What kind of pipeline; can you  
24 remember, that was exposed?

25 A. Well, the only reason I remember is because of what we

1     went over.

2           Q.     Yes.

3           A.     And it was a -- I'm pretty sure it was a 6-inch cast  
4     iron gas main.

5           Q.     Six-inch cast iron?

6           A.     I'm pretty sure that's what it was.

7           Q.     You don't think it could have been a larger diameter?

8           A.     Show me a layout and I'll tell you exactly what size it  
9     was. Other than that, I couldn't -- I really couldn't, you know,  
10    say. It might have been an 8-inch. I don't -- if you show me the  
11    paperwork, I'll tell you exactly what size the main was, but for  
12    me just to tell you what size it was from my recollection, I don't  
13    recall, you know.

14          Q.     So along Park Avenue east side, what is the approximate  
15    distance your exposure of the pipeline of cast iron was? How much  
16    did you expose excavating along Park Avenue east side?

17          A.     Like I said, once again, if you show me the paperwork I  
18    could tell you, but just to remember how much -- if it was 50  
19    feet --

20          Q.     No, just --

21          A.     What do you mean, 50 feet or --

22          Q.     -- excavated. How far do you go, I mean, by  
23    imagination, do you have --

24          A.     Well, basically I remember going from the corner, which  
25    is where the plastic was that I said on 116th Street. There was

1 plastic main down there.

2 Q. 116th Street?

3 A. Yeah, on a 116th Street, we went from the corner  
4 basically where that pipe was, somewhere off the corner, heading  
5 north up the block, which was probably about the width of whatever  
6 that building was on the corner at that point.

7 Q. So at the time you started the excavation there was  
8 already plastic pipeline on the --

9 A. There was plastic down on the corner of 116th Street,  
10 which is where we tied into.

11 Q. Okay. So you tied in -- so according to what you said  
12 earlier, you were not involved in the mechanical work?

13 A. That's correct. I do not do mechanical work.

14 Q. So how did you know how to tie in, or did you observe  
15 it, you know, with -- did you observe the tie-in of the pipe?

16 A. No. I was off when they did that. I wasn't in when  
17 they did the tie-in.

18 Q. What you are saying is that where you expect your  
19 company to tie-in; is that what you're saying?

20 A. That's correct. Yes. Yes.

21 Q. Okay. So looking at this -- I know this is the area.  
22 If you can give us a little bit of an idea what you did?

23 A. I'm saying, basically right down here where this dot is  
24 roughly, this is 116th Street, right?

25 MR. CHHATRE: Correct.

1           MR. RISTAU: Yeah, that's 117th. That's about where the  
2 plastic was, I would say, close to the corner. And we probably  
3 dug, you know -- there was this new building here. This was the  
4 building, the new building that they just put up. And that's  
5 where the encroachment was, where they went underneath the gas  
6 main.

7           BY MR. EMEABA:

8           Q. You mean this one or this one?

9           UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Wait, wait.

10          MR. RISTAU: I don't remember. Was it this one then?

11          BY MR. EMEABA:

12          Q. No, I'm asking that. I'm trying to learn.

13          A. I don't know. Show me, you know --

14          UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: These are all commercial. This  
15 is not -- 1642 is a brand new building.

16          MR. RISTAU: That's the brand new building?

17          UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Right.

18          MR. RISTAU: Right there?

19          UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That's the brand new building.

20          MR. RISTAU: Okay. So that where the encroachment was  
21 then. Okay. So then somewhere down in this area over here is  
22 where the plastic was. So, we went back to the plastic.

23          BY MR. EMEABA:

24          Q. So you went back to the plastic?

25          A. We went back to the plastic that was here, that's where

1 the sand was, and I assume we trenched somewhere up into this area  
2 probably. Whatever -- like I said, if you give me the paperwork,  
3 I can tell you -- they give you a point A and a point B. They can  
4 tell you exactly how far it was. Because that's what they do;  
5 when they do the encroachment they tell you dig from here to here.  
6 And then they want to cut that specific piece of main out because,  
7 due to the angles and however they figure out encroachments, that  
8 was enough to satisfy the encroachment.

9 Q. Okay. At your visit before you started your work, the  
10 excavation work at 1642, the building that you said the  
11 encroachment occurred due to the sewer work --

12 A. Well, say that --

13 Q. At 1642.

14 A. Oh, 1642? Okay.

15 Q. Yes, the building you mentioned about the encroachment?

16 A. Okay, yeah. All right, yeah. This one here? All  
17 right.

18 Q. Yes. Did you observe anything like from the building  
19 wall, a fence, before the roadway that you walked on? Was there  
20 anything like a fence between the house before the pavement?

21 A. No. I don't remember that. I don't know.

22 Q. Don't remember?

23 A. You mean like if there was something there and they're  
24 doing the work in behind it or something like that?

25 Q. Yes.

1           A.    No, I couldn't remember that.  It's like that with a lot  
2   of buildings, but I don't remember.

3           Q.    Okay.  Because you did mention the fact that, you know,  
4   the sewer people had to backfill their hole, their trench, which  
5   was deeper to a level you could actually work, and I wanted to  
6   find out, okay, how far did they backfill.  Did they backfill from  
7   the house up to the road or did they backfill from the house,  
8   maybe there's a fence, you know, to the fence, and then you took  
9   over.  Something like that, I wanted to know.

10          A.    I couldn't tell you that.  I really don't remember that.  
11   All I know is when we went there, the hole was up so that we can  
12   work at a decent level.

13                UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:  Can I ask a question?  Did you  
14   excavate to install a service also?

15                MR. RISTAU:  I don't think I did.  I think someone else  
16   might have done that.  I don't remember that though.  I don't  
17   know.  We can't go back over the what-do-you-call-its or no?

18                MR. EMEABA:  All right, thank you for now.

19                MR. RISTAU:  Okay.

20                MR. CHHATRE:  Chris?

21                MR. STOLICKY:  I'm all set.

22                MR. CHHATRE:  Frank?

23                MR. McCARTON:  I'm good.

24                MR. CHHATRE:  Okay, Matt?

25                BY MR. NICHOLSON:



1           Q.    Just to confirm, though, what you do recollect is that,  
2   that trench was partially filled up to less than 5 feet, you said?

3           A.    Well, it would have to be less than five feet, otherwise  
4   we'd have to put sheeting in there, you know, so --

5           Q.    So you're pretty sure you didn't have to excavate down  
6   to your main in front of 1642?

7           A.    I don't think so.

8           Q.    Okay.

9           A.    I don't think so.

10           MR. NICHOLSON:  That's all I have.

11           MR. CHHATRE:  Okay.  No other follow-up questions?

12           Thanks for coming, stopping by and helping us.

13           MR. RISTAU:  Okay.

14           MR. CHHATRE:  Off the record.

15           (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:           NATURAL GAS DISTRIBUTION PIPELINE  
                                  LEAK AND MULTISTORY STRUCTURE  
                                  EXPLOSION IN HARLEM, NEW YORK  
                                  MARCH 12, 2014  
                                  Interview of Raymond Ristau

DOCKET NUMBER:           DCA-14-MP-002

PLACE:                    New York, New York

DATE:                     August 7, 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.

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Keith Maurer  
Transcriber