

## 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

\*

EXPLOSION IN HARLEM, NEW YORK

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MARCH 12, 2014

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Interview of: ASHLEY DENNIS

Con 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)

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)

LaASIA HUNDLEY, Manager Gas Operations  
Con Edison

BRUCE FARINA, Business Agent  
UWUA Local 1-2  
(Representative on behalf of Ms. Dennis)

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## I N T E R V I E W

MR. CHHATRE: On the record. Good morning. Today is Thursday, August 7, 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 multistory structure 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 Investigator-in-charge of this accident. The NTSB investigation number for this 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. and manuscripts may be posted in NTSB's public docket.

Also, I'd like to inform Ms. Ashley Dennis 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 who you have chosen to be present with you during your interview.

1 MS. DENNIS: My name is Ashley A. Dennis, A-s-h-l-e-y,  
2 middle initial A, last name, D-e-n-n-i-s. I'm sorry. What was  
3 the second one?

4 MR. CHHATRE: Who you have chosen to be with you?

5 MS. DENNIS: Bruce Farina, from Local 1-2.

6 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. And your contact information,  
7 official contact information, no personal information.

8 MS. DENNIS: Our office are 30 Flatbush Avenue,  
9 Brooklyn, New York 11217, Fifth Floor.

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

15 MR. NICHOLSON: Matthew Nicholson, NTSB investigator,  
16 spelled M-a-t-t-h-e-w, N-i-c-h-o-l-s-o-n,

17 [REDACTED]

18 MR. DOWNS: I'm Richard Downs, D-o-w-n-s. I'm an  
19 investigator with NTSB out of Washington, D.C.; [REDACTED].

20 MR. EMEABA: Kalu Kelly Emeaba, K-a-l-u, K-e-l-l-y,  
21 E-m-e-a-b-a. I'm investigator with NTSB. My e-mail address is

22 [REDACTED]

23 [REDACTED] morning. My name is Frank McCarton.  
24 I'm a deputy commissioner in the Office of Emergency Management  
25 for the City of New York. I am the New York City party rep on

1 this investigation. My e-mail address is [REDACTED].

2 MR. FARINA: Bruce Farina, Local 1-2 Business Agent for  
3 gas operations. My e-mail address is [REDACTED].

4 MR. SINGH: Leonard Singh, L-e-o-n-a-r-d, S-i-n-g-h,  
5 Chief Engineer, Gas Distribution Con Edison; also the Con Ed party  
6 rep as part of this investigation. It's s [REDACTED]

7 MR. STOLICKY: Chris Stolickey, S-t-o-l-i-c-k-y. I'm the  
8 New York State party rep, Utility Supervisor (Safety) for the New  
9 York State Department of Public Service. E-mail address is

10 [REDACTED]

11 MR. CHHATRE: Thank you.

12 INTERVIEW OF ASHLEY A. DENNIS

13 BY MR. CHHATRE:

14 Q. Ms. Dennis, for the record please tell us your  
15 educational background, training, and what you do in your current  
16 responsibilities.

17 A. Currently I work within customer operations as a  
18 customer service representative. I work within the gas skills  
19 group which is a skills group created to assist our gas emergency  
20 department. I've been with the company for 5 years under the same  
21 title.

22 Q. Okay. And at the time of the accident, did you have the  
23 same responsibilities?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Any in-house training, any formal education?

1 A. In-house within Con Edison.

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. Yes, we do trainings. They're slightly -- at least  
4 annually we go over, we review -- actually, we've done it twice  
5 this year in regards to the gas manual and how gas emergencies are  
6 handled.

7 Q. Okay. Any formal education?

8 A. Formal, no.

9 Q. Okay.

10 MR. CHHATRE: And thank you for that and I'll let Rick  
11 Downs ask questions. Rick?

12 MR. DOWNS: Thank you, Ravi.

13 BY MR. DOWNS:

14 Q. Good morning.

15 A. Good morning.

16 Q. Your job title is customer service representative?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Is that the correct title? Great. And could you  
19 briefly describe what your job, general duties entail? Tell us  
20 what you do as part of that operation.

21 A. As a customer service representative I'm customer  
22 operations. I speak to customers mostly, but I am responsible to  
23 reach out to different departments to assist the customers within  
24 the specialized group created within my department, which is the  
25 gas skills group. We -- the majority are gas emergencies and

1 scene calls in which we mostly reach out to the gas emergency  
2 dispatchers. We handle restoration work for after gas  
3 emergencies, et cetera.

4 Q. And you mentioned your training, the training  
5 immediately preceding the event on March 12th generally  
6 describe --

7 MR. DOWNS: And we have that on the record somewhere,  
8 the training background for our witness?

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

10 MR. DOWNS: Okay. We won't bother with that right now.

11 BY MR. DOWNS:

12 Q. Let me ask you this. On the day of the event were there  
13 any unusual activities that day, any other emergencies that  
14 occurred in the system that you worked?

15 A. Emergencies within the system? I don't believe I  
16 understand.

17 Q. In other words, did you get any other gas odor calls  
18 that required your attention and it was a little bit of a complex  
19 situation? Or, no, it was a relatively routine day?

20 A. Routine, yes. Very routine.

21 Q. Okay, great. Procedurally, to address a gas odor report  
22 complaint, what would be the action routine or things that you do  
23 normally to address that particular report?

24 A. First, identify who I'm speaking with, where they're  
25 located, where the odor was smelled, how strong the odor was and



1 if there were any electric issues in the vicinity of that odor.  
2 After that, confirming do they know where the odor is coming from.  
3 I think I stated that. After confirming that information, I would  
4 read a general script that we read for each call to inform them of  
5 the hazardous condition.

6 Once the customer is off the line, I reach out to our  
7 gas emergency dispatcher to confirm that they received the ticket  
8 and that they've dispatched the job.

9 Q. Great. That's the G-E-R-C that we were --

10 A. Yes, GERC.

11 Q. -- talking about, GERC?

12 A. GERC.

13 Q. We're going to refer to it from now on as the GERC.

14 A. Correct.

15 Q. Okay, great.

16 A. That's how I know it as.

17 Q. Okay. On the day of the event can you describe for us,  
18 based upon your best recollection, what were the specific  
19 activities, step by step, when you got that particular first call  
20 we're talking about on the event from the accident site?

21 A. As I received the call, it was --

22 Q. Yeah, that was 1652 Park Avenue.

23 A. Yes. It was -- I read my procedure. Within the middle  
24 of the call, I realized who I'm speaking to, where he was located.  
25 He gave me a description of what was happening between that

1 evening and that morning, I recall. While putting in the  
2 information, I did have an issue with my system. It was frozen.  
3 At that point I muted the customer and spoke to the representative  
4 that sat next to me to see if they would be able to put through  
5 the ticket, and at that point they were unable. We both had  
6 system issues. At this point the customer, I believe, was on  
7 hold. I don't quite recall. But at the conclusion of the call, I  
8 had all of the information and I reached out to GERC.

9 Q. Right. Okay. That actually prompts my next question.  
10 Were there any hindrances to the completion of the call? You just  
11 described you had a problem with your computer system.

12 A. Yes, my system was freezing.

13 Q. And you turned to an associate during the call to see if  
14 that person could get through the ticket --

15 A. Issue the ticket, correct.

16 Q. -- or not and they had the same problem?

17 A. Correct.

18 Q. The call itself lasted about 6 minutes I see here, and  
19 you were on hold -- put the customer on hold a couple of times, as  
20 I recall, reading through the transcript and listening to the  
21 recording. Typically, when calls go through, if you don't have  
22 computer problems, best guess, how long would a call take to  
23 process; 3, 4 minutes? What's your --

24 A. For a regular procedural, about 2 to 4 minutes, tops.

25 Q. Two, 4 minutes?

1           A.    Um-hum.

2           Q.    Rough number.  Okay, that's fine.  And this one, because  
3 of the system snags it took you a little bit longer --

4           A.    Yes.

5           Q.    -- but you were able to get all the information  
6 ultimately and move that on to the GERC --

7           A.    Correct.

8           Q.    -- facility.  Great.  Okay.

9                   Now, in this particular call the customer had indicated  
10 that they smelled an odor of gas and you had indicated to evacuate  
11 the property.  Correct me if I'm wrong.  Yes?

12          A.    (No audible response.)

13          Q.    If there's a gas odor complaint call, such as this  
14 particular call, why not call 911 if the situation was serious  
15 enough to request that the caller evacuate the building?

16          A.    That is given -- actually, that responsibility is given  
17 to GERC.  If they feel that it is -- if they make the decision  
18 that it isn't, I guess, an emergency enough to contact 911, that  
19 they won't get there in time, they do that.  They'll advise us.

20          Q.    So they will follow-up -- the personnel up there will  
21 follow-up with 911, give the address and dispatch --

22          A.    Correct.

23          Q.    Very good.  Okay.  Okay, approximately how often do you  
24 receive and process gas odor complaint calls during a typical day?

25          A.    How many times?

1 Q. Best guess.

2 A. Average, I would say between 10 to 20.

3 Q. Roughly 10 to 20?

4 A. Um-hum.

5 Q. Okay. And what are the records that you typically  
6 compile to document the activities of the event? You have a data  
7 entry on your computer system, right?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Okay. Is there any manually recorded paperwork and any  
10 -- any method like that or, no, everything's done on the computer?

11 A. No, as long as the computers are running, yeah.

12 Q. Great. And let's see. Your calls, of course, are  
13 recorded, right?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. Okay. And you're well aware of that. Is there an  
16 operations or a procedures manual that you utilize during the  
17 course of your work?

18 A. Yes. We have a gas emergency manual.

19 Q. Gas emergency manual, okay. And is a copy readily  
20 available to you during the course of your business day? Do you  
21 have one right there at your business desk?

22 A. Yes, right at my desk.

23 Q. Okay, great. And you're familiar with the content?

24 A. Correct. Yes.

25 Q. Great. And did you use the manual in any way on this

1 particular call?

2 A. Yes, I did.

3 Q. You did. Okay. All right, regarding this particular  
4 event, is there anything -- meaning do you have any thoughts or  
5 factual observations that you've not covered so far today that you  
6 would like to add to your testimony? Any other thoughts that come  
7 up?

8 A. No.

9 Q. Nothing? Okay. Knowing what you know now -- I always  
10 ask this question -- other than hindsight and we're all in  
11 hindsight here, given the benefit of hindsight as a lessons  
12 learned observation, is there anything you would do differently  
13 today or that you would like to suggest to be done differently in  
14 the future similar situation?

15 A. No, I believe that everyone that's on my team when they  
16 takes calls, normally if we're having issues, we try to get it out  
17 some way. That's basically what we're told, just to try to get it  
18 to gas emergency as quick as possible so they can respond as quick  
19 as possible.

20 Q. Expedite as quick as possible?

21 A. Um-hum.

22 Q. Okay. And how often does your computer system have  
23 snags like you had on this particular call?

24 A. Not very often. I would say in a year's time maybe once  
25 or twice.

1 Q. Once or twice a year?

2 A. Well, yeah. Or maybe three, four, now that I think  
3 about it. But it's not very consistent. It's very random.

4 Q. We might follow-up with management on the availability  
5 of your system, okay, at some point. All right. That concludes  
6 my questions.

7 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Kelly?

8 BY MR. EMEABA:

9 Q. Ashley, did you finish your high school?

10 A. Did I graduate high school?

11 Q. Yes.

12 A. No, I did not.

13 Q. Thank you. So I'll end that question there.

14 I was looking for documents, I don't know where that is,  
15 from recording from your system. I had the statement from you  
16 telling the caller that do you know this is a hazardous condition.  
17 Do you remember making such statement?

18 A. Yes. That's a part of the script.

19 Q. Okay. And I'm not sure if I read the fact you asked the  
20 person to evacuate. So that's why I was looking for that document  
21 and I was expecting to hear that word telling the person to  
22 evacuate. Do you remember telling the person to evacuate that  
23 place?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Okay. And when you thought it was hazardous and from

1    what you said you asked the person to evacuate, I also heard from  
2    the individual telling you they believe the smell is from the  
3    (indiscernible) system for the fall system (indiscernible) and all  
4    that. Should that not have prompt you to ask him if he could tell  
5    residents of -- or risen an alarm for residents of 1644 and 1646?

6           A.    That is not something I was shown to advise. The  
7    purpose is to get the customer that may be in harm's way out of  
8    harm's way so we can respond as quickly as possible to find  
9    exactly where the odor is coming from, is my training.

10          Q.    Okay. So by your company policy if somebody gives you  
11    an idea of where they suspect the problem is, apart from calling  
12    the ticket to 1652, should there not also be a ticket to the  
13    address, the suspected address requiring them to also probe that  
14    same location?

15          A.    I'm not completely sure of the specific regulations on  
16    that. I don't know those off the top of my head. But --

17          Q.    I mean procedurally.

18          A.    Procedurally to advise gas emergency, if it isn't put  
19    into the ticket, we would advise verbally.

20          Q.    Okay. So but then on the -- did you generate the ticket  
21    yourself?

22          A.    I believe I did, yes.

23          Q.    Okay. So in the ticket generate, do you have an idea --  
24    can you tell us the notes you actually included on it?

25          A.    I cannot. I don't recall that.

1 Q. Okay. Were there notes that you included?

2 A. I don't recall. I haven't seen that ticket --

3 Q. Okay. When --

4 A. -- since I put it through.

5 Q. Okay. When you receive notification from a customer  
6 like that, what are the basic things you actually put in the note?

7 A. The basics within the notation that are --

8 Q. Yes.

9 A. -- within the prompts? Where the customer would be  
10 located or any special instructions or anything that wasn't asked  
11 within the script.

12 Q. So what -- the information that the customer actually  
13 give to you on their suspicion or what they think, you don't  
14 include it? Do you include it or not?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. You do. So that's what I asked you, can you remember  
17 some of the things you included based on --

18 A. I don't.

19 Q. -- your conversation?

20 A. I don't. I haven't seen the, actually seen the physical  
21 report of the call.

22 MR. NICHOLSON: I think we may have gotten the ticket, I  
23 think. So if you want to see what's on the ticket --

24 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Computer printout.

25 MR. EMEABA: All right. Thank you.



1 MR. CHHATRE: Chris?

2 BY MR. STOLICKY:

3 Q. Hi, Ashley.

4 A. Hello.

5 Q. Chris Stolicky. Do you only get gas leak calls or do  
6 you get calls for any type of customer service?

7 A. There is a schedule. There's days within my team,  
8 there's days where I would be on gas emergency for two consecutive  
9 days and the rest I'm on the regular credit calls. So I get both.

10 Q. So any particular day or time you're dedicated to just  
11 gas emergency calls?

12 A. Yes, for the majority of the day.

13 Q. Are you usually on the phone constantly with gas calls  
14 coming in or --

15 A. Constantly, no. There's usually space between them. A  
16 busy day there would be at least a couple of seconds. They're  
17 never really back to back.

18 Q. Okay. So if a call comes in and you answer, can you  
19 just kind of explain to us how the computer system works? Is  
20 there like a prompt that comes up for you to read or is there some  
21 type of flow chart that you manually follow?

22 A. Well, once the --

23 Q. I'm trying to get a visual.

24 A. Okay. Once the address is entered, then you enter the  
25 emergency portion of our desktop system. After you enter the

1 customer's information or the caller's information and indicate  
2 what they're calling for, it then provides you with a prompt for  
3 each step. So you ask a question, you answer it on how the  
4 customer answers; you answer through the prompt, it'll give you  
5 another step.

6 Q. So the computer program would pop up a different prompt  
7 depending on how you answer or how they answer?

8 A. It transitions differently, yes, depending on how the  
9 customer responds to the question.

10 Q. Okay. So if you're in the middle of doing this and it  
11 freezes, what happens? How can you proceed with --

12 A. Well, within the gas emergency -- within taking the gas  
13 odor the complaint, that's what the manual is there for. We do  
14 have a full manual that we can read prompt by prompt from.

15 Q. Okay. And how would you address a caller stating that  
16 they smelled gas inside versus outside?

17 A. The difference between inside versus outside is a  
18 different prompt to click, of course, within the ticket to advise  
19 GERC that it is indoors versus outdoors, but the only real  
20 difference in the script, to my knowledge, is whether the odor is  
21 strong or faint. But the script is pretty much the same for both  
22 indoor and out. It just alerts gas emergency whether it's indoors  
23 or outdoors.

24 Q. Based on your experience, what would you advise a  
25 customer to do, whether they're inside or outside and they smell

1 gas?

2 A. We advise to evacuate the area immediately where they  
3 suspect the gas is coming from, get somewhere safe and await the  
4 arrival of a trained mechanic.

5 Q. If it's inside, would you recommend that they open  
6 windows or doors?

7 A. If it is a faint odor, we are advised to -- we are  
8 prompted to advise to open windows.

9 Q. So you rely on the customer's description of the --

10 A. The odor.

11 Q. -- how strong the smell is.

12 A. Perceived to be. Um-hum.

13 Q. Okay. What action would you take if it was what would  
14 be termed as a reliable source, meaning like a school principal or  
15 a public official? What would you do in that situation?

16 A. Where they are reporting a --

17 Q. Smell of gas.

18 A. -- a smell of gas. Put through through the -- follow  
19 the prompts, and then we are instructed to follow the prompts and  
20 inform, whether within the note portion or verbally, inform the  
21 gas emergency dispatcher I speak with. If there is any  
22 specialties to the situation, I would advise them verbally or  
23 within the note.

24 Q. Okay. And what would you do if the caller speaks a  
25 language that you don't understand or you don't speak?

1           A.    Depending on the language, specifically where I sit  
2   there are two bilingual representatives that sit right next to me,  
3   so if it is a Spanish caller I normally would transfer directly to  
4   one of them. And if it is outside of Spanish, we have a language  
5   line that we are advised to use.

6           Q.    Can you talk a little bit about that?

7           A.    Our language line is a translator line in which we can  
8   -- I've never gotten a language that I couldn't find there within  
9   moments, a couple of moments. You have to enter an access code  
10   and verify who you are by your employee number and then request a  
11   language, and normally within a couple of seconds you have a  
12   representative translator on the line.

13          Q.    How do you identify the language? I'm just curious.

14          A.    Verbally. So if your -- if it's Cantonese, they give a  
15   moment and you say Cantonese. It repeats it and then they'll give  
16   you a Cantonese representative.

17          Q.    Okay. That's all I have.

18                MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Frank?

19                BY Mr. McCARTON:

20          Q.    Good morning, Ashley.

21          A.    Good morning.

22          Q.    I'm sorry, I'm going to have to ask this question, but  
23   what is the GERC? What is GERC?

24          A.    GERC is the Gas Emergency Response Center.

25          Q.    And so you're in the customer care center. Right? Like

1 a --

2 A. The call center.

3 Q. Call center. Right. And then there's another center  
4 that just takes these emergencies that you feel is necessary, or  
5 they all go to the gas emergency --

6 A. Any gas leak tickets or any gas tickets that are put  
7 through, whether they're leak tickets or non-leak tickets, go to  
8 gas emergency response.

9 MR. McCARTON: Are we speaking to them also?

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes.

11 BY MR. McCARTON:

12 Q. So, from your experience then, this call that you took  
13 that day, how -- and I'm sorry, I didn't read the transcripts of  
14 the call. Could you describe to me what the caller said to you on  
15 the phone from your recollection? To the best you can tell me,  
16 were they panicked or was it just like a normal call for you?  
17 What was it like?

18 A. He wasn't panicked, but he did seem concerned. He  
19 mentioned that, I believe, his partner smelled gas the night  
20 before and that that morning of he smelled it, as well. He  
21 prepared himself and his family. His family left, he left and he  
22 returned, and that's when he contacted us.

23 MR. McCARTON: And that call came in what time from  
24 our --

25 MR. DOWNS: 9:14:16.

1 BY MR. McCARTON:

2 Q. 9:14. And then so that call -- so that caller said, I  
3 smell some gas and I'm going to leave the premises of 1652 Park  
4 Avenue. Is that correct?

5 A. Well, no, he mostly described his specific situation.  
6 He waited for me to advise.

7 Q. Okay. And you told him to evacuate?

8 A. I did advise that.

9 MR. DOWNS: I'm sorry there's a correction on that. I'm  
10 looking at the GERC ticket. Do we have a call time on that?

11 MR. SINGH: Somewhere in the records, yes.

12 MR. CHHATRE: I thought -- my recollection is around  
13 9:05. Do you remember?

14 MS. DENNIS: I do not.

15 BY MR. McCARTON:

16 Q. And in your career and you've been doing this a while,  
17 how many gas calls do you take in your career -- I mean, this is  
18 just like an ordinary call that you've taken, or is it -- did  
19 something in the back of your head stand up or did you feel  
20 anything differently about this call?

21 A. It wasn't a normal call. Normally, I smell gas  
22 somewhere, the stove; it's very cut and dry. His was very  
23 interesting. It's very odd to hear a customer say they believe  
24 it's coming from another building. But that deals differently  
25 with, you know, how buildings are. Some are adjacent, some are

1 separated. So that was an oddity. Outside of that, it was a  
2 normal procedural gas call.

3 MR. DOWNS: Yeah, I have that time here, I'm sorry,  
4 9:06:23 when that call came in and it concluded at 9:12:14.

5 MR. McCARTON: 9:26 is it?

6 MR. DOWNS: 9:06.

7 MR. McCARTON: 9:06.

8 MR. DOWNS: Concluded at 9:12.

9 MR. McCARTON: Okay. Thank you.

10 MS. ASHLEY: Okay.

11 MR. CHHATRE: Len?

12 BY MR. SINGH:

13 Q. Good morning, Ashley.

14 A. Good morning.

15 Q. I understand 5 years in the company, so you've hit the  
16 milestone.

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Yes. Congratulations.

19 A. Thank you.

20 Q. So a couple questions about your formal education. Do  
21 you have a GED?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Was that a requirement for employment?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Okay. So 5 years in the company, have you always been

1 in the call center?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Can you tell me about the requirements to get to this  
4 position where you are? Walk me a little to how you got to where  
5 you are, the training you received, whether it's classroom, on-  
6 the-job, before you actually sat at a desk to take calls?

7 A. To my memory, after the -- once hired, we had a --

8 Q. Did you take a test to get in?

9 A. Yes. I did take a test. Once I was advised that I  
10 passed the test, I was contacted and advised that I was being  
11 hired. After being hired, I went through medical. After medical,  
12 there was a 6-week training? I know it recently changed, I think,  
13 to 9. I think at the time I was trained it was 6 weeks. Six  
14 weeks in a mock kind of call center, everyone had their own desk,  
15 step-by-step, teaching us to become customer representatives  
16 dealing with everything from billing to accounting to taking  
17 emergency calls.

18 Q. Okay. And once you finished that 6-weeks training, you  
19 went to the job?

20 A. Then there was on-the-job training. So within those 6  
21 weeks we had days where we did on-the-job training in the actual  
22 call center. After the 6 weeks, after graduation, we then went  
23 into the call center under a coach and we were under this coach, I  
24 believe, for close -- I don't recall exactly how long, but I feel  
25 like it was maybe a couple of months we were watched and then



1 given to a supervisor. From that point it still kind of shadowing  
2 -- excuse me, that was prior to being on our own, we shadowed a  
3 representative for a couple of days, and then into the coach being  
4 within the full team, and then we were on our own.

5 Q. In your 5 years, once you became a call taker, is there  
6 follow-up training, refresher training that you get periodically?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. What does that training entail?

9 A. A lot of that training are tailgates on -- depending on  
10 if their system changes. Some trainings are e-mailed to read  
11 individually. Some trainings are on the learning center website,  
12 and then there are virtual trainings. Those we do most often.  
13 Yeah, that's about it.

14 Q. Now, you mentioned a script. I think Chris asked you a  
15 little bit about the script that you follow that you -- you know,  
16 the questions you ask a call taker and you follow different  
17 scripts based on the answers provided. Anywhere in that script  
18 does it suggest -- do you recommend to the call taker to evacuate  
19 and also knock on doors and let neighbors know to evacuate? Is  
20 that part of your script anywhere?

21 A. The script says to evacuate the premises and tell others  
22 to do so, as well. It doesn't specific -- it doesn't advise,  
23 specifically, what to do, but to advise others as well.

24 Q. Are your calls monitored by a supervisor and do you get  
25 randomly checked for quality and what have you?

1           A.    Yes.  They are lively monitored, but they are recorded  
2   and monthly -- because of the skills group I'm in, I have credit  
3   calls reviewed as well as two gas calls reviewed.

4           Q.    Are there measures in terms of call taking that you are  
5   tracked, you personally are being tracked or your group is being  
6   tracked by judging performance, you know, how quick you get to the  
7   call, resolution, and quality of when they review these calls?

8           A.    In terms of time, I don't believe that's a part of i.  
9   But, yes, the quality of the call, how the customer was handled,  
10  if the script was read promptly and efficiently.

11               MR. SINGH:  That's all I have for now.

12               MR. CHHATRE:  Okay.

13               MR. SINGH:  Thank you.

14               MR. CHHATRE:  Matt?

15               BY MR. NICHOLSON:

16           Q.    Just to follow up on that, the reviews that are  
17  performed on your -- the quality reviews that are performed, is  
18  that for the emergency side or just the customer care?

19           A.    Both.

20           Q.    Both.  Okay.  When you were talking about the computer  
21  system problems that happened, that occurred on the day of the  
22  accident, how do you resolve those?  How do you fix your computer  
23  after it's frozen like that?

24           A.    Normally it's a restart.  We're advised to restart.

25           Q.    A full restart?

1           A.    Um-hum.

2           Q.    Okay.  And the script that you read, how often is that  
3   updated or reviewed, do you know?

4           A.    I don't.

5           Q.    Okay.  Do you ever have -- is there annual training to  
6   go back over the script or review changes?

7           A.    I believe at least twice a year we do a review it.

8           Q.    How does that process work?  Can you just --

9           A.    It's either a tailgate or we do what's called  
10   communication coach.  It's kind of a virtual trainer and that has  
11   to be done, I believe, every 6 months, if not annually.  I don't  
12   remember.  And it's basically a virtual call and that's part of  
13   the training.

14          Q.    Okay.  So they give you a scenario and you have to read  
15   through your script?

16          A.    Correct.

17          Q.    What was the tailgate?  What's that --

18          A.    A tailgate is basically when within our teams we all  
19   come together.  It's not a formal meeting.  So we come to our  
20   supervisor's desk, handouts are given out and we discuss what the  
21   training is.  And there are two points, to my memory, every year  
22   that we do the gas emergency.

23          Q.    I'm sorry, so you go to your supervisor's desk, they  
24   hand something out --

25          A.    Um-hum.  And it's a script of the -- it's a script of

1 the prompts, basically. We read through what -- and guide you  
2 through a gas emergency call.

3 Q. Okay. So it sounds like it's just your script all over  
4 again.

5 A. Yes. So it's re-reviewed and if there's any questions  
6 we can ask them.

7 Q. Oh, I see. So in your 5 years, has the script ever  
8 changed from what you --

9 A. Maybe slight adjustments, but nothing to memory.

10 Q. Okay. Okay. Thank you.

11 BY MR. CHHATRE:

12 Q. Hi.

13 A. Hi.

14 Q. Just a couple of questions here.

15 A. Okay.

16 Q. When does -- you said the department was called gas  
17 skill group. Do you know when it was created?

18 A. When it was created? It was prior to me coming to my  
19 floor.

20 Q. Before you joined.

21 A. Not -- I don't believe the company, but I started the  
22 company on the fifth floor, which is off hours, and then I came to  
23 the second floor, which is on hours, which is basically business  
24 hours.

25 Q. And what are your typical work hours?

1           A.    My typical at this time are 9:15 to 5:45. At that time  
2 were 8:30 to 5.

3           Q.    8:30 to 5:00. Okay. When you answer the phone, you  
4 pretty much -- your computer prompts you to ask the next question,  
5 you said.

6           A.    With a gas emergency, yes.

7           Q.    Now after the computer froze and you restarted or  
8 rebooted the computer, the problem was solved. Am I correct?

9           A.    I don't remember.

10          Q.    Okay. Was the issue ever looked into by your supervisor  
11 as to why both computers froze, you and person sitting next to  
12 you?

13          A.    I don't have that confirmed. I did advise my supervisor  
14 that was the case, but I don't know how far --

15          Q.    Nobody came back to you to look at your computer after  
16 that?

17          A.    I don't remember.

18          Q.    Okay. And you said, I think, to an earlier question you  
19 said typically 10 to 20 calls come to you for gas odor complaints.

20          A.    Um-hum.

21          Q.    Typical --

22          A.    Typical.

23          Q.    -- (indiscernible). Now, do you ever get a feedback  
24 from your Gas Emergency Response Center that how many of those  
25 turn out to be true gas odor complaints, how many of those are

1 just --

2 A. No. We don't know that.

3 Q. Does anybody -- do you ever have any interaction with  
4 GERC to discuss how did the call go through or whether they are  
5 getting bombarded with, I wouldn't call it phony calls, but random  
6 calls, if you would, that the gas odor complaint came but there  
7 was no odor, no issue?

8 A. I'm sorry. Could you restate that please?

9 Q. When you get a call, 10 to 20 calls, do you ever know  
10 how many of those are true gas odor complaints?

11 A. No.

12 Q. You don't. Okay.

13 MR. McCARTON: Can I ask a question on top of that?

14 MR. CHHATRE: Sure.

15 MR. McCARTON: If you start to see multiple calls for an  
16 address or an area, do you guys see that on a screen, an e-mail or  
17 does that pop up, like, in your pod that you're in, like, oh, my  
18 god, I'm getting a call at this address, you're getting a call.  
19 Does anybody --

20 MS. DENNIS: Within my department, no. That all happens  
21 in gas emergency.

22 MR. McCARTON: Thank you. I'm sorry to interrupt.

23 MR. STOLICKY: Hi. This is Chris Stolicky. I think  
24 when we have Kevin Fagan here later, that would be a question to  
25 ask him.

1           MR. FARINA: He's the recipient of the call that she  
2 made to the GERC.

3           BY MR. CHHATRE:

4           Q. Post-accident, were you drug and alcohol tested?

5           A. Yes.

6           Q. Did anyone tell you the results of the test?

7           A. No.

8           Q. Did you ask anybody what are the result of the test?

9           A. No.

10          MR. SINGH: Let me just let you know if the test failed,  
11 or depending how you look at it, pass or fail, she wouldn't have  
12 been put back on duty. That's --

13          MR. CHHATRE: I understand. I was --

14          MR. SINGH: Oh, okay.

15          BY MR. CHHATRE: I understand the procedures but --

16          Post-accident, did the call center, the group or your  
17 supervisor, in particular, did they go back to your recording and  
18 listen to it to see whether you handled everything right or  
19 whether any lessons learned or review of that particular call?

20          A. Did my supervisor review the call?

21          Q. Yes.

22          A. Yes, I was advised. Post-accident, yes. I was advised  
23 that he did review the call.

24          Q. With you or by himself?

25          A. By himself.

1           MR. McCARTON:  If I could interrupt there?

2           Were there any comments as to the review by your  
3 supervisor?

4           MS. DENNIS:  It was questioned whether or not I had  
5 anything to do with the freezing, meaning like I had anything  
6 plugged into the computer or if I knew anything outside of what  
7 was recorded on the screen why the computer would freeze.  Outside  
8 of that, no.

9           MR. McCARTON:  So there was no other exception to the  
10 process that you went through on that call?

11          MS. DENNIS:  Oh, no.

12          MR. McCARTON:  Okay.  Sorry, Ravi.

13          MR. CHHATRE:  No problem.

14          BY MR. CHHATRE:

15          Q.  Did the caller told you that he came back from the  
16 street to report this call?

17          A.  He advised me he was on his way to work and he came back  
18 home.

19          Q.  Okay.

20          A.  But I don't know how far he got --

21          Q.  Now, does this prompt to tell the caller to evacuate or  
22 not to turn the electric switch on, is also computer prompted or  
23 that or that is something you did on your own?

24          A.  That is prompted.

25          Q.  That's prompted.



1           A.    Um-hum.

2           Q.    And did you go back in this review with your supervisor  
3 or on your own, typically what a call -- how long the call lasts  
4 if there is no computer glitches? You said 2 to 4 minutes. How  
5 did you come up with that? Just a guess or --

6           A.    From my own personal knowledge. Normally it depends on  
7 how lengthy the customer talks and the explanation that they give.  
8 If it's a very short call, it's normally around 2 minutes.

9           Q.    Okay.

10          A.    If it's not, it's normally around 3 to 4. Um-hum.

11          Q.    Do you remember, was there any lessons learned meeting  
12 between you and -- you, not meaning you personally, but with your  
13 group and the GERC in terms of what went right, what went wrong in  
14 this particular call?

15          A.    Formally, no.

16               MR. SINGH: Can I interject for a second, Ravi?

17               MR. CHHATRE: Sure.

18               MR. SINGH: We haven't done an internal lessons learned  
19 or interviewed any company employees as a result of this process.

20               MR. CHHATRE: I didn't mean interview. I simply meant  
21 this is a call that came in, you answer the call, what went right,  
22 what went wrong.

23               MR. SINGH: Yeah, but I'm -- we haven't pulled people  
24 together to discuss it because of this process.

25               MR. McCARTON: Is that the normal process, though, to do

1 a review, a lessons learned review?

2 MR. SINGH: Yeah, we -- yes, yes. We do a meeting --

3 MR. McCARTON: But you have not in this particular case?

4 MR. SINGH: Right. Because we were advised not to taint  
5 anybody, or potentially influence.

6 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. All right. We can talk off the  
7 record.

8 MR. SINGH: Okay.

9 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. That's all I have. Thank you so  
10 much for helping us. Follow-up?

11 BY MR. DOWNS:

12 Q. Yes. Ms. Dennis, you indicated you -- some days you  
13 work electric, some days you work gas complaints. How is that  
14 determined?

15 A. There is a queue with a list given within my gas skills  
16 group and it moves on week to week, and the 2 days you're on, 2  
17 days you're off taking regular credit calls.

18 Q. Depending upon the demand of the type of calls on that  
19 particular day?

20 A. Correct. So if the calls become higher, then we may put  
21 another person on. It's all about the demand --

22 Q. Allows the flexibility of the system?

23 A. Exactly.

24 Q. Okay, good. When a caller calls in -- I'm not familiar  
25 with the process. Is there a prompt when the person makes the

1 call to Con Ed customer service, is this an electric complaint or  
2 is this a gas complaint? Is that how it works?

3 A. Yes. I believe it's the first part within our automated  
4 system.

5 Q. Hit number 1 to go electric; number 2 to go gas,  
6 whatever.

7 A. Something like that, yeah.

8 Q. And it then gets shifted over to your desk or --

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. -- whomever happens to be next in the queue has  
11 available --

12 A. Whoever's available. Correct.

13 Q. -- to take the call. And off the top of your head,  
14 estimation, how often do you work gas and electric, 50/50,  
15 roughly, or 20/80?

16 A. With the recent transitions in my team, we've -- a lot  
17 of people have been promoted and moved, so, yes, about 50/50,  
18 60/40.

19 Q. Half time you're on electric, half time you're on gas?

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. You've been doing this for roughly 5 years, since you  
22 joined the company?

23 A. With the emergency, more so my last 3 years. My first 2  
24 years were all just regular credit, but my last 3 have been, yes.

25 Q. The last 3, and then complaint calls the first 2 years,

1 roughly, were --

2 A. Credit.

3 Q. -- credit calls.

4 A. Which was hard.

5 Q. The sales processing calls.

6 A. Billing --

7 Q. Billing and such.

8 A. -- accounting, et cetera.

9 Q. I see. And is it to be advanced to the gas complaint-  
10 electric complaint calls do you need so many years of billing  
11 calls experience in order to move on to the phase that you're at  
12 right now?

13 A. I'm unsure of that. To be honest with you, I don't  
14 think it's a matter of time. It's a matter of call quality.

15 Q. I see. So you're evaluated on the business side of the  
16 process, the billing process, and based upon your performance  
17 there you then can advance to the gas complaint-electric complaint  
18 process.

19 A. The gas skills group. So it's just a skills group  
20 combined within our department. It's not formal, I don't believe,  
21 to the company. It's something created within my department to  
22 assist everyone else within that department.

23 Q. Great. Now let's shift a little bit on what Frank was  
24 mentioning a few minutes ago. In your particular group, let's say  
25 there are some calls, a bunch of calls from a given neighborhood

1 or location.

2 A. Um-hum.

3 Q. You get this particular call. Let's say if somebody  
4 else a few minutes earlier had gotten a similar call down the  
5 block or around the corner, whatever. Is there any mechanism in  
6 your shop there that would allow for communicating between the  
7 call processors? In other words, to understand a trend that's  
8 occurring in a given neighborhood?

9 A. The only thing, we -- when you pull up an address, if  
10 that specific address has had a -- all of the calls for whichever  
11 emergency comes in is listed when you open it if you search that  
12 address. But in putting a -- when you input the ticket, that does  
13 not come up. You have to go and search it. So it's for the  
14 individuals to see that --

15 Q. I see. To make sure I'm understanding this you're  
16 typing in the information of this particular address --

17 A. Um-hum.

18 Q. -- and the system will flag it if there's an address  
19 down the street or something, or you have to go search it?

20 A. No, it has to be the specific address. So if for the  
21 same address we received five calls over the last 5 years, there  
22 would be the list there if you search that address.

23 Q. Just that specific address?

24 A. That specific address.

25 Q. And if was next door, it wouldn't necessarily flag it

1 unless you went looking for it?

2 A. Unless I put in next door's address.

3 Q. Okay. We're not talking about the event now, we're  
4 talking about generically.

5 A. Okay.

6 Q. How often would you actually go search a particular  
7 neighborhood for other calls in a given neighborhood? Would that  
8 be routinely or rarely?

9 A. That would be circumstantial. So if we're looking into  
10 -- as I say, we do restorations, as well. We're looking into  
11 restorations, we look at the tickets that have been there, what  
12 has happened at this location, what could possibly be needed. So  
13 it depends on the situation.

14 Q. So the system has no way of internally comparing within  
15 a given neighborhood a volume of complaint, gas leak complaint  
16 calls?

17 A. For us, no.

18 Q. No. And you would actually have to go looking for it  
19 and there'd be nothing necessarily that would prompt you unless  
20 you happen to recall, oh, I got a call in this neighborhood  
21 yesterday; let me go check?

22 A. Exactly.

23 Q. Would that be a fair --

24 A. Unless I look for it, there's no way to compare there's  
25 no way to compare --

1           Q.    That would be a fair evaluation, a fair way of saying  
2   that?

3           A.    Yes.

4           MR. McCARTON:  Great.  Okay.  That's good for me.

5           MR. EMEABA:  No.  I don't have anything for her.

6           BY MR. NICHOLSON:

7           Q.    Now, just real quick I'm not sure we heard.  How many  
8   emergency operators are on a shift?

9           A.    Emergency operators, my team, we have 14?  Fourteen, and  
10   normally 7 are on the gas emergency line.  There's also the X  
11   schedule that's on with those and they normally have 3.  So give  
12   or take between 8 to 10.

13          Q.    Eight to 10 that are dedicated to gas?

14          A.    Yes, that are only on gas emergency.

15          Q.    Eight to 10 that are gas, and the others are electric?

16          A.    Well, we don't handle electric.

17          Q.    Okay.

18          A.    But there is a line that we get anything for  
19   municipalities or anything coming for about one to two people, but  
20   there are specifically at least five to seven that are  
21   specifically on gas, gas emergency and steam.

22          Q.    Okay.  From customers?

23          A.    Correct.

24          Q.    Okay.  And just to clarify, these tickets that you send  
25   over to GERC, are you prioritizing?  Are they prioritized from the

1 script that you're reading in this computer system?

2 A. Yes. By leaks and non-leaks. I don't know how much  
3 further that goes but, I personally know that a leak is priority  
4 over everything.

5 Q. A leak is priority, but within leaks are they  
6 prioritized?

7 A. Oh, that I don't know.

8 Q. At your end? You don't know. So everything you get  
9 goes to GERC, pretty much?

10 A. Yes, is routed directly.

11 Q. Okay, great. Thanks.

12 BY MR. McCARTON:

13 Q. In your five to seven operators, is that typically  
14 sufficient to handle the volume of calls or do you ever get  
15 overloaded, in your experience?

16 A. No.

17 Q. Five to seven is a good number that they typically  
18 operate with. Okay. And what happens if you start, suddenly get  
19 overloaded with calls? Are there other personnel that can be  
20 brought in?

21 A. Yes. There's --

22 Q. Instantly brought in?

23 A. My full team is trained. So there's only a portion of  
24 us that are on the line, but the full team is trained. So if we  
25 needed the full 14, the full 14 would be placed on.



1 Q. Be enough capacity to absorb the calls that started  
2 coming in?

3 A. Correct.

4 Q. And has that ever happened where you've been so  
5 overloaded with calls that they've had to bring in more people?

6 A. Maybe once or twice.

7 Q. Once or twice in the 3 years?

8 A. Within the last 3 years, yes.

9 MR. McCARTON: Okay. Very good. That's good for me.

10 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Yes?

11 BY MR. STOLICKY:

12 Q. As far as day-to-day operations, are you guys, meaning  
13 the physical operators, measured against any kind of time standard  
14 or how long it takes you to answer a call or to complete a call?  
15 Was that measured --

16 A. Generally?

17 Q. -- in the past? Yes. I mean like, is there a clock on  
18 the wall that --

19 A. Oh, no.

20 Q. -- that shows how long people are on hold or --

21 A. Oh, yes. There's a board that advises, it's normally  
22 how many calls are waiting which are regular credit and billing  
23 calls. It'll advise us if there's any gas calls waiting, any  
24 steam calls waiting; employees' modes, meaning unavailable,  
25 available; and supervisor approval and things of that nature. So,

1 yes, there is a board.

2 Q. And at some point, whether it be like an annual review  
3 or anything do you sit down with your supervisor and do they  
4 discuss this? Either, whether it be individual or as the team, to  
5 say we need to get --

6 A. Discuss what exactly?

7 Q. -- a little more efficient or --

8 A. Like in -- I don't believe I understand the question.

9 Q. Any are there any type of performance standards that you  
10 guys are measured against to try to make improvements or be a  
11 little more streamlined when you handle calls?

12 A. In regards to gas emergencies or emergencies, no. In  
13 regards to billing and credit calls, there is an average that  
14 we're given to try to keep with, yes.

15 MR. STOLICKY: Okay. That's all. Thanks.

16 MR. DOWNS: That just actually prompted a question by  
17 me. Follow-up real quick?

18 MR. CHHATRE: Go ahead.

19 BY MR. DOWNS:

20 Q. Worst case scenario, a call comes in and says, oh, my  
21 God, I've got a fire in the back of my stove or something. Do you  
22 have a prompt that you would follow saying something to the  
23 effect, get out of the house now? Or is that turned over to the  
24 GERC folks to handle from that point on?

25 A. With fire? No. I would contact 911 immediately.

1 Q. You would contact 911?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. So there is that mechanism that would allow you to  
4 expedite the process rather than go through the GERC --

5 A. Yes, I would -- fire is isn't within our department.

6 Q. -- for an obvious critical situation?

7 A. So if it's gas related, then that will take a specific  
8 priority, of course. But fire or sparking, things of that  
9 nature --

10 Q. Anything that's obviously critical, get out of the house  
11 now?

12 A. Yes, that's the fire department directly.

13 MR. DOWNS: Okay, great. Thank you.

14 MR. CHHATRE: Lenny?

15 MR. SINGH: Excellent.

16 MR. CHHATRE: Anybody have any questions? Frank?

17 MR. McCARTON: No, I'm good. Thank you.

18 MR. CHHATRE: All right. Thank you so much for coming.

19 MS. DENNIS: Thank you.

20 MR. CHHATRE: Appreciate all your help.

21 MS. DENNIS: Thank you.

22 MR. CHHATRE: Off the record.

23 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

24

25

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 Ashley Dennis

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.

---

Beverly A. Lano  
Transcriber