

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

CSX EMPLOYEE FATALITY IN *

WALBRIDGE, OHIO * Accident No.: RRD23FR017

ON SEPTEMBER 17, 2023 *

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Interview of: BRANDON BARKER, Mechanical Supervisor
CSX Transportation - Walbridge

CSX Walbridge Yard
Walbridge, Ohio

Monday,
September 18, 2023

APPEARANCES:

RICHARD SKOLNEKOVICH, Operations Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

MATT THOMPSON, Investigator-in-Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

BRIAN BENDEL, Track Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration

STEVE AMMONS, Senior Director of Train Handling Rules
and Practices
CSX Transportation

ROBERT CRAWFORD, Operating Practices
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Federal Railroad Administration

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I N T E R V I E W

(2:12 p.m.)

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2
3 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay. Good afternoon. My name is Richard
4 Skolnekovich, and I am the NTSB operations group chairman for this
5 accident. We're conducting an interview today on 18 September
6 2023 with Brandon Barker who works for CSX. This interview is in
7 conjunction with the NTSB investigation of the accident that
8 occurred at Walbridge, Ohio, on 17 September 2023. The Accident
9 Reference Number is RRD23FR017.

10 The purpose of this investigation is to increase safety, not
11 to assign fault, blame or liability.

12 Before beginning the interview and questions, we'll go around
13 and introduce ourselves. Please spell out your last name and your
14 title. I'll start off and then pass it to the right.

15 Again, my name is Richard Skolnekovich, S-k-o-l-n-e-k-o-v-i-
16 c-h, NTSB investigator.

17 MR. BENDEL: Brian Bendel, B-e-n-d-e-l, FRA, track inspector.

18 MR. AMMONS: Steve Ammons, A-m-m-o-n-s, CSX, senior director
19 of train handling rules and practices.

20 MR. CRAWFORD: Robert Crawford, C-r-a-w-f-o-r-d, FRA, OP.

21 MR. GURZYNSKI: Jason Gurzynski, G-u-r-z-y-n-s-k-i, FRA,
22 motor power and equipment inspector.

23 MR. THOMPSON: Matt Thompson, T-h-o-m-p-s-o-n, NTSB,
24 investigator-in-charge.

25 MR. BARKER: Brandon Barker, B-a-r-k-e-r, mechanical

1 supervisor with CSX.

2 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay. Thank you, Brandon. Before we
3 start, you understand that today it's being recorded and that we
4 can't guarantee any confidentiality, and that this recording will
5 be transcribed and put on a public docket. And you're good with
6 that.

7 MR. BARKER: Yes, sir.

8 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay. All right. We'll go ahead and get
9 started then, Brandon.

10 INTERVIEW OF BRANDON BARKER

11 BY MR. SKOLNEKOVICH:

12 Q. If you could, could you start off with just telling us a
13 little bit about your railroad career?

14 A. Hired in November of 2021, November 1st specifically. I
15 hired in off the street as a mechanic supervisor, came in, started
16 training with the at-the-time superintendent, Mr. Talbert.
17 Trained with him for about a month and then started training with
18 the other mechanic supervisors for a total of about 6 months worth
19 of on-the-ground training with them. And then started, you know,
20 kind of coming out on my own. I always had somebody there working
21 with me in case I had questions or any kind of concerns that I
22 had, somebody that I could ask. I was kind of working on my own
23 for a couple of months, and then I went to night shift in July of
24 last year, and I've been on night since then.

25 Q. Okay. This is a regular job. It's not like as fill needed

1 kind of job? It's a regular --

2 A. Yeah, it's a regular position.

3 Q. Okay. All right. And have you worked -- did you work on the
4 railroad prior to 2021 at all?

5 A. No, sir.

6 Q. Okay. So this is your first railroad?

7 A. Yes, sir.

8 Q. Okay. All right. All right. So your official title, are
9 you a mechanical supervisor? Is that your official title?

10 A. Yes, sir.

11 Q. Okay. Supervisor. Can you give me kind of an idea of just
12 general -- I know you work nights, but general day-to-day
13 activities? What is it that you do?

14 A. I usually come in about 5 p.m. is usually when I get on
15 property. Start off -- we do, we do a shift changeover with the
16 outgoing supervisor, you know, what kind of manpower we have on
17 hand at the time, any kind of outstanding tracks need completed,
18 any kind of incidents that have gone out during the day, going out
19 on the road issues or any major concern that are on their way to
20 us, a car that needs, you know, bad (ph.) ordered or repaired when
21 it gets here or locomotive issues that are on hand or on their way
22 here, that all need to be address when they get here, just kind of
23 go through changeover, let us know like what's going on. We talk
24 about 15, 20 minutes depending on what we have going on that day.

25 Then I'll sit down at the desk, start going through emails

1 for the day, just playing catch up. See if there's any emails
2 that need responded to, respond to anything that needs my
3 attention. I'll go through and check, you know, RRES (ph.), RNTI
4 (ph.), see what kind of tracks or outstanding inspections we have.
5 I go through (indiscernible), check the bedeler (ph.) account,
6 look at what my en route trains are for the night, because I've
7 got to start planning for, you know, if my third shift manpower,
8 make sure I've got enough guys to cover the traffic. After I go
9 through all that, it usually take about an hour or hour and a
10 half.

11 I'll go down and speak to the guys on second shift shop
12 floor, make sure they're doing okay. They usually operate on a
13 plan that's put together before I get here. I go down and look,
14 make sure the plan's actually going according to plan, make sure
15 they don't need anything. And I'll either go out and speak to the
16 guys in the yard and see how everything's going out there on
17 second shift, and see if I'm going to need -- maybe I have to call
18 somebody in early on third or not, and I'll let them know what the
19 manpower I'm going to need, if I'm calling for overtime for thirds
20 or not, kind of give them an idea of what I see coming at us and
21 like what other kind of traffic we might be dealing with for the
22 night, see if they need anything, supplies, batteries in
23 flashlights, any of that kind of stuff.

24 And about that time, then I'll come back up to the shop, go
25 through some more emails, make sure the guys if they need anything

1 on the road. Every once in a while, something will happen and we
2 don't get a phone call. It just kind of depends on if the
3 dispatcher is busy or not, and I'll make sure there isn't anything
4 that's going on in the territory that I need to respond to. If
5 not, I go through some other stuff on the computer.

6 About 9 o'clock, I'll get with the leadman out in the yard
7 because I usually end up having to call a few times at 9 o'clock
8 when they do their overtime calls. So I call them right around 9
9 o'clock, see if anybody took the jobs or not. And if I have the
10 opportunity before the start of third shift, I go out and try to
11 do some O testings, not always. It's not always possible to get
12 out before 11, and then I usually do, you know, either I go out
13 and hunt for EFTs or I just little maintenance stuff around the
14 yard, what I do to try to kind of help get ready for third shift.

15 And about quarter to 11, I'll go down to their shanty and get
16 there a little bit ahead of everybody. That's coming in for
17 thirds. And we'll -- I usually go into the shanty and make a pot
18 of coffee before the third shift starts and kind of hang around,
19 wait until all the shift gets there at 11, kind of let everybody
20 funnel in and make sure everybody's clocked in, and we'll usually
21 sit -- we start our job briefing about 5 after. We'll conduct our
22 start of the shift job briefing, usually lasts somewhere between
23 20 to 30 minutes kind of depending on what we end up talking
24 about. We try to hit, you know, on all of our big safety
25 concerns. We'll go over some of our temporary close clearances

1 that we have out here depending on what cars are -- depending on
2 what cars are sitting in what tracks. Some tracks, if they're
3 occupied by cars, it's a little closer than if just one track. So
4 if they have to work say track 5 and they've got to walk both
5 sides of it, if there's cars in track 6, between 5 and 6, it might
6 be kind of close, but between 4 and 5, it might not be as close.
7 So we just kind of go over -- sometimes we go over that. We
8 actually went over that specifically Saturday night.

9 And we'll go over concerns that the guys have noticed out in
10 the yard, stuff in the walking areas that needs addressed or weeds
11 that need cut down. We just ask them if there's any concerns that
12 they have found that need brought up to be handled.

13 About the time we end the safety brief, about 11:20 to 11:30,
14 the yardmaster's usually calling down to the leadman on the desk
15 to go over what tracks need work, inbounds and outbounds. I
16 usually hang out down there until after he's gotten all the tracks
17 from the yardmaster so I have an idea of what we have to start on,
18 and if there's something that needs work first or -- I'm kind of
19 there to help prioritize and make sure we've got a plan, we get
20 everything knocked out in a timely manner.

21 After we get our plan, after I've done talked to everybody, I
22 usually everybody a safe night, and I'll come back up to the
23 office, check email and start going through some of morning report
24 information, seeing what needs updated and I start getting
25 together my plan for that. Then usually between 1 and 3,

1 depending on what else I've got going on that night, I'll go out
2 and make rounds, some rounds around the yard, try to do some
3 operational testing.

4 And then I usually -- I usually do rounds around the yard
5 until 2:30 in the morning maybe. It kind of depends on the night,
6 but I try to be back up at the shop by 3 just because that's when
7 everything kind of starts to, like line and road issues, they seem
8 always happen somewhere around 3, between 3 and 4 in the morning.
9 I want to make sure I've got access to the URs (ph.) that are
10 coming out, make sure I, you know, I'm watching because for
11 whatever reason, that's like our witching hour. Something usually
12 seems to happen between those hours.

13 So usually between -- about 3 I'm back up in the office going
14 over morning report stuff, going over emails. I usually -- if
15 there's a MMDR that needs done, I've got a mechanical mainline
16 delay report, I'm getting information for that, filling that out
17 and get it sent off. And then that usually got to 5 a.m. when my
18 relief gets here, and we go and do another shift change and do our
19 turnover and usually I head home --

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. -- about 5:15, 5:21 in the morning.

22 Q. Between 5:15 and 5:20. The turnover -- so like when you
23 first come on, the turnover, is it just, is it just mechanical
24 related like, you know, bad orders and stuff like that, when you
25 first come on?

1 A. Um-hum.

2 Q. Okay. Is there any discussion about just any of the safety
3 issues? Maybe I misunderstood when you were talking. Do you talk
4 about any safety issues or safety concerns or O testing conducted
5 in the beginning of the day on the previous shift?

6 A. If there's, if there's guys that are overdue or if there's
7 two or three new ones that need O testing done that they didn't
8 get to them that day, we will go over that.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. And if there's something on one of those shifts that was
11 brought up as a safety concern, that will get relayed to me, hey,
12 by the way, I sent out an email about these tracks, they need
13 cleaned up or I sent out or we'll talk about anything that was
14 brought up to us safety concern-wise or anything that we noticed
15 that either they didn't get a chance to send an email, if they
16 want us -- they asked me to do it or, hey, you'll see an email
17 but, you know, this area needs addressed, and if you want to relay
18 that to third, if an area in this, in this -- I found an issue in
19 this area.

20 Q. Okay. Let me ask you. So the O testing for subordinates, is
21 it -- is there a specific amount of tests that's got to be
22 conducted per employee or is it just a specific amount of tests
23 that each manager has to do in a period?

24 A. Yes. Per -- each manager has a certain number each week they
25 need to conduct.

1 Q. But no individual tests. So one employee could have five
2 tests and the other employee could have zero tests?

3 A. Every employee does need tested at least once a month.

4 Q. On anything?

5 A. On anything.

6 Q. Okay. And then managers have just regular tests that they
7 have to conduct?

8 A. Yes, sir.

9 Q. Okay. So just generally speaking, what kind of tests do you
10 and the other supervisors conduct on carmen for that one per
11 month?

12 A. The big ones we usually hit on are our test 24. That's our
13 inspection of outbound trains or cars being added to a train,
14 going out and doing -- make sure we're doing qualify inspections,
15 make sure everything's leaving out of here safely. Another one is
16 our hand operation of switches and derails. That's a big one
17 especially for our shop guys. They're constantly having to
18 operate that hand operated derail in front of the shop. Then
19 there's quite a few hand operated switches out in the yard as well
20 that our yard carmen have to operate pretty regularly. So that's
21 another big one that we try to hit on.

22 The other one would be our blue flag testing, make sure the
23 guys are locking their tracks up properly, not lining tracks into
24 them, make sure they're lining them away from them, they're using
25 their locks, putting their flags up and at night, make sure we're

1 using our lights which is why, you know, I had -- I'm always
2 asking the guys, make sure they have batteries because you don't
3 want your batteries dying on your flags in the middle of your
4 move.

5 Climbing up on cars to knock brakes off, that's another big
6 one we try to, we try to test on pretty regularly to make sure
7 people are getting up onto the equipment properly, using their
8 three points of contact, dismounting properly. We had, you know,
9 we had an injury in the past. The guy slipped coming off a car
10 taking a hand brake off and that's another thing we try to harp
11 on, make sure everybody's being as safe as they can climbing on
12 these cars especially when it's wet and icy out during the winter.

13 Q. Yeah. So within the last month, just generally, have you
14 found any noncompliances or any rules issue you're testing on?

15 A. Not in the last month, no.

16 Q. What about -- what was the last serious noncompliance issue
17 that you found?

18 A. Last noncompliance I had, I was actually in Detroit because
19 at the time, we were also covering the Detroit area, and I had a
20 younger employee miss -- it was a smashed handhold that he had
21 missed on an outbound inspection.

22 Q. Okay. All right. So I want to go back to when the third
23 shift comes on -- I've got to go back to the job brief. Who leads
24 the job briefs?

25 A. I do.

1 Q. Okay. Can you kind of give me just a general rundown of
2 typically what you cover during a job brief? I know you discussed
3 part of it, but can you go a little bit more in detail?

4 A. Okay. I usually start off, you know, ask how everybody's
5 doing? Trying to get an idea of how everybody's kind of, you
6 know, know their mindset for the evenings. I usually get head
7 nods from everybody, maybe not necessarily a verbal but I usually
8 look around and I get everybody's like we're doing okay, you know.
9 I go in and I start with --

10 Q. It's okay. Take your time. There's no rush on this.

11 A. And then I usually go around and ask anybody if there's any
12 concerns that need brought up that maybe they heard from another
13 shift that may not have been brought up yet, ask anybody if
14 they've got anything that they specifically want to talk about.
15 It's usually a no. Every once in a while, somebody will bring up,
16 you know, something about, you know, close clearance or weeds or
17 walking conditions. That's usually the big three people hit on.
18 I'll go on that they want to make sure we're locking tracks, make
19 sure, you know, check our lineups, that we're watching out for
20 each other, make sure, you two are going to be the biggest thing
21 to keep each other safe. So make sure we're checking with the guy
22 we're working with. And that's about most of it.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. And we kind -- sometimes we talk about other stuff just
25 depending on the day. We'll pick a different topic, make sure --

1 sometimes talk about making sure, like we'll go over climbing on
2 cars or sometimes we'll go over lining switches. Sometimes we'll
3 go over just different things every day. Try to keep it less dry
4 because it can get repetitive and boring, and that is when people
5 -- you start losing people and try to keep it a little more
6 lively, but that's about it.

7 Q. Okay. I want to make sure. So when they, when they bring up
8 some of the safety stuff, are they giving that to you or are they
9 reporting it to a system?

10 A. No, they give it directly to us.

11 Q. Okay. And then what do you guys do with it?

12 A. Depending on what the concern is, we -- usually we'll take
13 that information back and either -- if we need pictures of it,
14 we'll go out and get pictures of it. We'll come back, and we'll
15 put together an email and send it to the appropriate department
16 that needs -- that would help address that issue. A lot of it has
17 to do with walking conditions and track conditions and stuff like
18 that.

19 Q. How would you characterize the response to the emails and the
20 safety concerns?

21 A. Sometimes we get a quick response. Sometimes it may take a
22 couple of days. And I know it takes -- it usually takes a little
23 bit of time to get a plan together. I would say on average maybe
24 a week.

25 Q. Okay. Now, are you guys involved in the plan. Say you send

1 it out to a department, but they -- are you involved in, you know,
2 whatever corrective actions or do you just hand it to a department
3 and they handle it?

4 A. If there's, if there's a part that we can help assist in
5 getting things line up, we will do what we can but a lot of it has
6 to do with getting track time from the transportation department,
7 make sure, you know, the tracks are clear and then it's setting up
8 the manpower on that department's end, if they can afford the
9 manpower to send out and handle that specific concern.

10 Q. Okay. All right. I'd like to talk a little bit about the
11 carmen that work in the yard. So do they always work in pairs?

12 A. Mostly, every once in a while we don't have enough people on
13 shift for everybody to work in a pair. Sometimes there's a one
14 man crew. But if possible, we try to keep everybody in pairs, but
15 this is not always possible.

16 Q. Okay. All right. Now, the carmen that work in the yard, do
17 you have a different way of testing them? Okay. So folks that
18 are working -- you have carmen who work in the shop. You have
19 carmen working in the yard.

20 A. Um-hum.

21 Q. And they're kind of doing different kind of work. Do you
22 kind of segregate the different type of O tests or do you just
23 kind of broadly hit all of them with the same type of tests?

24 A. The guys in the shop, when we do test them, we try to stick
25 to O tests more about utilizing of tools, working the shuttle

1 wagon, chocking cars and jacking. Those are usually the O tests
2 that those guys get, making sure they're jacking the cars
3 properly, inspecting their tools, using the right tools, so
4 they're not using like something they made because we -- you can
5 -- if you have an injury as a result of manufactured tool that's
6 not approved. So they -- the shop guys usually have a different
7 set of O tests as opposed to the guys out in the yard that we
8 focus around just because it applies more to them.

9 And the one that usually -- the ones that usually cover all
10 of them would be like your hand operation switches, derails and
11 (indiscernible) equipment because they do have to set the brakes
12 in the shop pretty often when they shove cars out. They have to
13 tie down each car they shove out or if they have to make a cut in
14 our storage tracks as we pull cars apart, they have to tie
15 everything down. So they're getting up and tying hand brakes
16 quite often, and they're also climbing up on a shuttle wagon
17 pretty often.

18 So generally they get a different kind of set of O tests but
19 we can also utilize those O tests in the yard because guys in the
20 yard are also using tools, and they're doing yard repairs, brake
21 shoes and stuff like that. So some of that kind of bleeds over
22 into the yard guys but not all of it.

23 Q. Gotcha. Do you kind of track the difference, like when
24 you're, you know, I know you've got an O test system, but do you
25 like have anything else separate where you keep track of who's

1 being tested on what?

2 A. There is, there is a tracker in our VIZ report system.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. It tracks who's been tested on what and how -- and when that
5 test was done. You can go in and check to see like, okay, this
6 individual's been tested on this recently but not this, and you
7 can kind of go off of that.

8 Q. Okay. All right. So now -- what I want to talk about now is
9 just, can you -- you've heard what a remote control zone is.

10 A. Yes, sir.

11 Q. Okay. Can you kind of tell me what a remote control zone is?

12 A. It's a zone inside the yard that remote control equipment's
13 going to be operated in. It has boundaries set in place utilizing
14 a puck (ph.) system that's laid within the track. I know they
15 have to -- that the remote control operator has to on the start of
16 their shift, they have to roll their whole zone into the
17 functionality of those pucks. It also ensures that their zone's
18 clear and that everything's lined the way they need it aligned at
19 the start of their shift.

20 Q. Okay. So the purpose of establishing the zone, is it just to
21 go out to those pucks?

22 A. It's not just to go out to the pucks. It's to ensure that
23 their whole route is clear, that there's nothing obstructing the
24 tracks or anything that can cause, you know, any kind of safety
25 concern, derails or anything like that. It's to ensure that the

1 pucks are functioning and to make sure that their whole zone is
2 clear before the start of their shift.

3 Q. Okay. And does all the RCO zones, do they all have pucks?

4 A. As far as I know, yes.

5 Q. Okay. Do you know what the pucks do?

6 A. I know that they talk to the locomotive as they get closer,
7 and that as they get to that puck, it'll start -- it can reduce
8 speed and even stop the engine if need be also, but there's also
9 an override option on the remote control operator's control.

10 Q. Okay. All right. I want to ask you. So when a remote
11 control zone is established, can mechanical forces work inside
12 that zone?

13 A. They can. They have to contact the RCO foreman to get
14 permission to go into his zone and lock tracks.

15 Q. Okay. Can you kind of walk me through the procedure of how
16 they do that?

17 A. Okay. So they go -- so they'll receive their track from the
18 leadman like, okay, I've got to go out and work in eastbound yard
19 which is one of our remote zones. They'll contact the 97 job.
20 97's our main switching engine on the east end. They'll contact
21 him via radio. Hey, you know, it's usually 397 for third shift.
22 Hey, 397, I've got to go in and work eastbound, you know, 6 and 7.
23 Can I have permission to lock out those tracks? And he'll key
24 back like, yeah, you're good to go lock them up. And then
25 sometimes they'll let them like, hey, since you guys are locking

1 up those tracks, just to let you know, we'll probably be moving on
2 tracks that are in your vicinity.

3 Q. Okay. Can you give me an idea when the carmen call up and
4 ask for permission, what is the purpose of that permission? Is it
5 -- you know, why are they asking the RCO for permission to lock
6 those tracks or to go into that zone? I'm sorry.

7 A. I mean a part of it is to give -- to let that operator know
8 there are going to be workers like in his zone, and also if he
9 still has work to finish or anything like that like, hey, you guys
10 can't have that yet. I've still got to move cars either in or out
11 of the track or I'm going to be moving close to it and -- because
12 sometimes they don't give it to us, he won't -- they won't receive
13 permission immediately. So they've got to finish and they don't
14 want anybody trying to go in there and lock something up when
15 they're still working in the track. And it also lets that RCO
16 know that those electronic switches are not going to be
17 functioning because they're going to be disabled and locked out.

18 Q. That's fine. It's not a test. It's just --

19 A. That's all I've got.

20 Q. Okay. So with the -- when the carmen go into the zone, and
21 they've got permission from the RCO, is there -- based on your
22 experience working with -- working this yard, is there an
23 expectation that there won't be any equipment moving where they're
24 going to be working at? Are they expected to just be on the
25 lookout while they're connecting their work?

1 A. It's expected for them to be on the lookout because plans
2 change. It could -- you know, the original plan could have been
3 like, hey, there won't be anything moving in the tracks next to
4 you. That plan could change, and it's expected to always be
5 looking for something next to you to start moving. If the track
6 next to you isn't locked out, you should always be expecting
7 something to be moving next to you.

8 Q. Okay. All right. So, the carmen, when they go in there,
9 they're required to get permission to get inside the zone, right?

10 A. Um-hum.

11 Q. What about when they clear up? Are they required to contact
12 the RCO to let him know that they're done with their work?

13 A. I don't believe it's required, but they do if circumstances
14 allow. We'll get ahold of the foreman, hey, we're clear of these
15 tracks but they've also got lights on the switches themselves and
16 when the switch is disabled, it'll show a white light showing that
17 switch has been disabled. Once the guys clear, obviously all the
18 flags are gone, the lights are gone. That switch will go back to
19 green.

20 Q. Gotcha. Okay. That's all I have for now. Thank you.

21 A. Um-hum.

22 MR. BENDEL: No questions.

23 BY MR. AMMONS:

24 Q. Brandon, thank you for being here today. Steve Ammons, CSX.
25 You mentioned earlier there about your nightly routine, how around

1 11 o'clock or a few minutes prior, you go down there and you're
2 ready to brief oncoming crews. Did you do that Saturday night?

3 A. Yes, sir.

4 Q. Okay. Did you actually -- did you brief George and Frank?

5 A. George and Fred.

6 Q. I'm sorry, yeah. I have Frank written down. Fred, I'm
7 sorry.

8 A. Yes, sir, they were there for the briefing.

9 Q. Okay. Did you notice anything unusual with George or Fred
10 that night or did they seem normal?

11 A. No, everything seemed normal with both of them.

12 Q. Did Fred mention any issues or concerns or anything with him?

13 A. No, not that night.

14 Q. Okay. How about your -- you talked a little bit about
15 operational testing. Have you done any recent operational testing
16 on George or Fred?

17 A. I believe I did an operational test on Fred on the 6th of
18 September for blue flags.

19 Q. And what would that test look like? I mean --

20 A. Generally it is all -- if I know they're working a track,
21 I'll go out and I'll visually check both sides of the track that
22 they're working to ensure that the switches are aligned correctly,
23 the locks are applied, and they have their flags in place. If I'm
24 able to get there before them, I'll also do -- make sure they're
25 operating the switches correctly, but sometimes I'm not able to

1 get there before them and they usually have it locked up before I
2 get there, but I'll go and I'll verify that it has been locked out
3 properly.

4 Q. What about in the past with Fred? Do you ever take any
5 issues with his work, whether it be testing or just observations
6 in general?

7 A. No, I've always been fairly pleased with how Fred does his
8 work. He's been one of the more interactive employees I've had
9 during job briefings. He's been very -- he's always been one
10 that's -- if he has a concern, he's been very -- he's never been
11 reluctant to bring it up. And we've always, we've always gotten a
12 lot of good feedback from Fred.

13 Q. Do you ever do any testing on situational awareness, you
14 know, around track, moving equipment, things like that, stopping,
15 looking both ways before crossing tracks?

16 A. I pay attention to it when I'm watching the guys, but I don't
17 specifically do an operational test but if I see something, I'll
18 say something to the guys like, hey, I noticed that you kind of
19 didn't look all the way that direction. I don't -- it's not -- I
20 don't usually see it as -- I don't usually find it being an issue.
21 I -- everybody I see is usually pretty -- very good about looking
22 both ways.

23 Q. But you have observed some instances where maybe it wasn't by
24 the rule or --

25 A. Not necessarily, no.

1 Q. What's your, what's your interpretation? What do you believe
2 the rule requires around that?

3 A. I mean the rule requires they, you know, that they have to
4 look both ways. I know sometimes in cameras or depending on where
5 you're observing them from, it's hard to tell exactly how far
6 they've looked to actually see if they were able to see the
7 direction.

8 Q. Anything else in that rule that's required around approaching
9 the first track?

10 A. Other than verifying there's no moving equipment coming from
11 either direction, I can't think of it off the top of my head.

12 Q. What's the most common failure you get with operational
13 testing? I know you spoke of the last failure you had, but what's
14 the most common failure?

15 A. It would be missing mechanical defects during an inspection.

16 Q. What about -- so that's more craftsmanship. What about
17 personal safety? What would be your most common failure? Like,
18 you know, rules that are found in a safe way, you know.

19 A. Um-hum.

20 Q. Whether it's PPE or --

21 A. I'd have to say the use of safety glasses. A lot of the guys
22 don't like keeping them on all the time especially when it's wet
23 out. That would probably be the most common thing I see when it
24 comes to, when it comes to safety, guys not wanting to wear safety
25 glasses as often as they should.

1 Q. Okay. And you mentioned -- well, I don't know if you did or
2 not. Are you a qualified drone pilot?

3 A. Yes, sir.

4 Q. And how often do you -- did you speak to us earlier about the
5 drone, using drones? I don't think you did.

6 A. No.

7 Q. Okay. We had someone else speak to that. So how often do
8 you do testing with drones?

9 A. I just got qualified maybe 3 weeks ago. I've only been able
10 to fly twice.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. On the day, on the day I finished my qualification which I
13 think was 3 weeks ago, I flew it with MTO, Mr. Banford (ph.). I
14 came out and qualified with him and flew it and the first time
15 I've been able to fly it after that was actually Saturday evening
16 before third shift. I went out and flew it with MTO Mac Smith
17 just trying to get some flight hours in because I'm still very,
18 very new to operating the drone and using it.

19 Q. Did you find any exceptions on that night?

20 A. No, sir.

21 Q. What was that?

22 A. No, sir.

23 Q. Okay. Were you ever involved as an observer with drones
24 prior to you being qualified?

25 A. I was.

1 Q. Okay. Has any of your employees ever raised any concerns to
2 you around drone testing?

3 A. They have. They're obviously not a fan of it. They feel
4 like they're getting spied on with it, and it makes -- and some of
5 them have said it makes them a little uncomfortable knowing that
6 there could be a drone following them around the yard. And that's
7 probably -- that's usually the biggest concern we get out of it.

8 Q. When you've been involved in a test with drones, have you
9 ever noticed an employee looking up at the drone prior to them
10 knowing or were they unaware of the drone testing until you
11 approached them?

12 A. Yeah, I don't, I don't recall ever seeing anybody notice the
13 drone. I've never noticed anybody looking up and making like
14 visual contact with it. I've never noticed that.

15 Q. Okay. Can you talk about the safety training that your
16 employees receive annually, triannually, biannual? I mean how do
17 they received it? What type of training do they receive?

18 A. I mean there's quarterly online training they're required to
19 complete, and there's -- it's not the same. It's not the same
20 training every, every quarter. Some quarters, there's power brake
21 law and blue flag refreshers and inspection refreshers. Other
22 quarters have stuff about using the sim car airbrake test machine.

23 Q. Has any of your employees ever brought any concerns up to you
24 around the radios that are inside the trucks that they use?

25 A. Inside the trucks? As far as like their operation or --

1 Q. Yeah, as far as them working.

2 A. We had one instance a couple weeks ago -- no, that was with
3 handhelds. No, I've never had brought up but we had issues with
4 the trucks that are mounted in the radios or the radios mounted in
5 the truck.

6 Q. As far as you know, are the radios in the trucks working?

7 A. Yes, sir.

8 Q. I think that's all I've got for now. Thank you.

9 MR. CRAWFORD: Robert Crawford.

10 BY MR. CRAWFORD:

11 Q. One question I have is as you look back at the incident, is
12 there anything as you look at it that you thought you might change
13 to help the issue -- I mean the incident not occur?

14 A. I mean I guess the biggest thing I would harp on especially
15 moving forward is to make sure the guys are like talking to each
16 other before they go out on their track, make sure they're
17 communicating with each other inside that truck even though, you
18 know, like regardless of how much experience you have out here or
19 how many times you've done it, just, you know, talking with the
20 guy you're working with and making sure each other, both have
21 their -- have your head in the game. I believe -- I mean
22 definitely going forward, I'm going to harp on that harder.

23 Q. Thank you. That's all I have.

24 MR. GURZYNSKI: Jason Gurzynski, FRA.

25 BY MR. GURZYNSKI:

1 Q. Brandon, thanks for being here.

2 A. You're welcome.

3 Q. Just a couple follow-up questions. I know Steve was just
4 asking about the radios in the trucks. I know after the job
5 briefs, I've witnessed in the past mechanical employees doing
6 truck inspection reports. Is that still currently done here in
7 Walbridge Yard at the beginning of every shift for every truck?

8 A. Not as much any more, no, sir.

9 Q. So it's more --

10 A. I mean guys, guys go out and they will check their own truck.
11 They don't put it on paper. If they find a concern, they usually
12 call us directly.

13 Q. Okay. So that's more of -- it's not really required. If
14 they find it, if something's wrong, they reach out to you?

15 A. Yeah, if something's wrong, they'll reach out to somebody
16 onsite and make sure it gets -- it's documented.

17 Q. Okay. And to follow up what you were talking about with
18 Rich, the carmen mechanical staff, whoever it may be, contacting a
19 RCO prior to applying blue flag, blue signal protection, is that
20 something that's required or is that more of a recommended?

21 A. No, it's required.

22 Q. It is required.

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Obviously on all three shifts.

25 A. Um-hum.

1 Q. And all carmen performing. But it's east end or the west end
2 of Walbridge?

3 A. I usually hear it more for the east end of the main switching
4 side because that's where the foreman's out of, is up there on
5 that east end switching lead. That's -- we don't, we don't
6 usually have a whole lot of RCO switching on the west end. It
7 does happen but it's not always a RCO working.

8 Q. Is that something that would fall under your operational
9 tests if you witness a carman putting up a blue flag and not
10 contact the RCO?

11 A. I mean that would fall under proper radio rules and I believe
12 so, yes.

13 Q. Okay. I've got nothing further. Thank you.

14 A. Um-hum.

15 MR. THOMPSON: Matt Thompson, NTSB.

16 BY MR. THOMPSON:

17 Q. I apologize if this was asked but I crossed off all my other
18 ones I was going to ask you. Just curiosity, how do you test for
19 quality inspections during your efficiency? Do you go and walk
20 after the carmen or do you have someone else go out and look at it
21 or do you do a sample inspection of half a dozen or --

22 A. I usually go out and do -- I'll walk 10, 15, it kind of
23 depends on the night, but I usually walk at least 10 cars of the
24 track that they had worked. Sometimes more, sometimes maybe less.
25 If it's a short track that they worked, 25, 30 cars, I'll walk the

1 whole thing both sides, and I'll check the whole thing. I usually
2 average 10 to 15 cars. I'll walk in, check everything. I'll walk
3 back out the same side, and double check.

4 Q. Okay. Yeah, I was just curious on that. Thank you.

5 A. Um-hum.

6 MR. THOMPSON: I have nothing else.

7 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay. Rich Skolnekovich, NTSB.

8 BY MR. SKOLNEKOVICH:

9 Q. I kind of just want to go back on some safety rules. So
10 under the safe way CSX, so that requirement to cross tracks, can
11 you kind of walk me through what CSX requires for an employee to
12 cross tracks?

13 A. It's to visually verify there's, you know, nothing moving in
14 the direction you need to go. Make sure you're looking both ways.
15 Make sure you're checking your walking route, looking for tripping
16 hazards or looking for any kind of -- anything that you could step
17 on that might be a problem, but the biggest thing is to make sure
18 that there's nothing moving anywhere close to you.

19 Q. Is there any time or distance spacing from equipment? If
20 equipment's moving, is there, you know, you've got to have 10
21 seconds or you've got to have 100, 200 feet? Is there anything
22 like that specified that you know of? Or you just look both ways.

23 A. I mean you definitely look both ways, but there's -- I can't
24 think of the number off the top of my head.

25 Q. Okay. All right. You've been out there obviously at night,

1 right?

2 A. Yes, sir.

3 Q. Okay. So do you wear like hardhat with a flashlight?

4 A. I do have a headlamp mounted to my hardhat, and I've also got
5 a handheld flashlight to take with me.

6 Q. Okay. All right. Just, you know, just general
7 characterization, you know, how -- I know crossing tracks can be
8 -- you're always going to look out, you know, for what's out
9 there, but with all the added switches and, you know, conduct that
10 runs out to the switches, do you find it's, you know, hazardous to
11 walk through? Do you have to kind of focus on where you're
12 walking more than?

13 A. Depending on where you're walking into, there are some areas
14 that there -- that where you're stepping could definitely --
15 there's definitely a lot of stuff laying around on the ground that
16 you need to make mental note of, but you can -- a lot of it you
17 can visually verify before evening have to foul a track. And if
18 -- I know me personally, if I know one area is a little more
19 hazardous to walk through than another area, I'll usually try to
20 walk in where it's -- where's there's less possibility of me
21 stepping or tripping on something, get to the track I need to and
22 then walk up in the clear if I'm going to a specific switch,
23 that's the way I personally try to do it.

24 Q. Okay. Do you ever, do you ever mention that to any of your
25 employees?

1 A. I can't think of a time I've brought that up specifically.

2 Q. Okay. Has any employees brought up any like specific areas
3 where they just consider it more higher likely of getting tripped
4 or falling based on where they're working?

5 A. I mean I get walking condition concerns brought up?

6 Q. Yep.

7 A. But, it's -- a lot of it's concerned around the main
8 switching area down on the east end because you'll have scrap
9 steel get knocked out of cars and creating tripping hazards or
10 pretty much any kind of load that isn't tied down to a car, it
11 could get knocked out and there's usually stuff laying out there
12 that gets brought up. As far as areas of like around switches and
13 -- not really, no.

14 Q. Okay. Okay. Thank you. That's all the questions I have.

15 MR. BENDEL: No questions.

16 BY MR. AMMONS:

17 Q. Just one follow up here. Did you, did you respond to the
18 incident that night?

19 A. Yes, sir.

20 Q. Or that morning? You did. When you got there, did you do
21 any type of investigation, take any statements or --

22 A. Not in any written down. I know when I got there, obviously
23 George was very distraught, and I kind of, you know, I spoke to
24 him, made sure he was -- okay isn't the right word, but make sure
25 he wasn't having some kind of medical crisis at the time, and I

1 kind of looked down and then I wanted to go down and verify that
2 Fred was no longer with us. Having some first responder training
3 and having some medical training, I wanted to make sure there was
4 nothing I could do at the time. And I went back and talked to
5 George and tried to get him to calm down. And then Mr. Ogzeer
6 (ph.) was down there as well, and I talked with Mr. Ogzeer to make
7 sure that he was -- that, you know, he was okay, okay as you can
8 be in that situation. And about that time is when first
9 responders started showing up and law enforcement started showing
10 up. And after they had started securing the scene, I had Gary
11 take George back to the shanty, get him to sit down, get him some
12 water, and then not long after that, I actually brought medics
13 down there to verify George was okay.

14 But as far as immediately upon coming to the scene and
15 verifying that Fred was indeed deceased, I focused on making sure
16 everybody else was okay and taking care of everybody that was
17 involved at the time. After we got law enforcement and medics on
18 scene, and after everybody had started to calm down a little bit
19 is when I asked anybody if they were able at the time to make
20 statements and what they saw or what they heard or anything that
21 could be relevant, and I did get statements from several employees
22 about an hour and a half afterwards.

23 Q. Who did you get statements from?

24 A. My leadman of the night, Mr. Dan Lobauer (ph.). I got one
25 from Mr. Larry Google (ph.), Mr. Gary Ogzeer. George was unable

1 at the time to supply a statement. And Mr. Andre (ph.) was still
2 there with us. He didn't feel comfortable doing on at that time.
3 He wanted to make sure he was clear headed and he could remember
4 anything.

5 Q. Did you watch any video of the event?

6 A. I have not.

7 Q. Okay. Were you able to determine or form an opinion of what
8 happened that might help us in this investigation?

9 A. From getting on scene and seeing it, I didn't have any
10 opinions formed of exactly what had happened. I just know from
11 what other people have said from watching the video, I don't think
12 I have a good opinion of what exactly happened.

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

14 MR. GURZYNSKI: I don't have anything.

15 MR. CRAWFORD: Nothing further.

16 MR. THOMPSON: Matt Thompson. Nothing from me.

17 BY MR. SKOLNEKOVICH:

18 Q. Okay. All right. Brandon, kind of a follow up, the last
19 question, is there, based on what you do know, is there anything
20 that you'd like to add that might help prevent an accident from
21 happening again in the future?

22 A. We really need to harp on complacency. Complacency, staying
23 focused, not getting, you know, some guys are too focused on a
24 specific aspect of something, and not getting overly comfortable
25 with going about, you know, your day-to-day job activities. Once

1 you start getting too comfortable with something, once you start,
2 you know, getting relaxed in doing it because you've done it so
3 many times or something like that, that's when stuff starts to
4 happen, and we saw it. I saw it on active duty. Even on
5 deployments we had guys that start relaxing on the things that
6 they did at the beginning to ensure their own safety, and it's
7 something that we harped on then and it's something that we need
8 -- that really, really needs focused on. It's keeping everybody
9 focused and regardless how many times you do it and regardless how
10 many times you've done something, you should treat it like it's
11 the first time you're doing it.

12 Q. Very well put. In the future, if we have any follow-up
13 questions, do you mind if we reach out and contact you?

14 A. Not at all.

15 Q. Okay. All right. Unless anybody has anything, on behalf of
16 the NTSB, we really appreciate your time and your cooperation
17 coming down here and helping us take a look at the accident.

18 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: If there's nothing else, then the time is
19 now 3:02, and that will conclude the interview.

20 (Whereupon, at 3:02 p.m., the interview was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

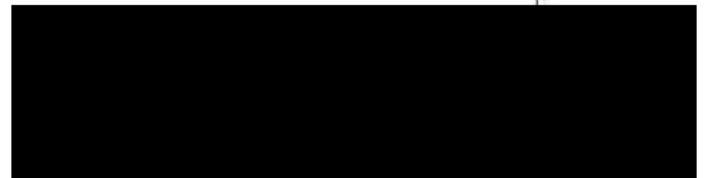
IN THE MATTER OF: CSX EMPLOYEE FATALITY IN
WALBRIDGE, OHIO
ON SEPTEMBER 17, 2023
Interview of Brandon Barker

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD23FR017

PLACE: Walbridge, Ohio

DATE: September 18, 2023

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



Transcriber