



**Human Performance Attachment – Truck Driver Interview**

**Teutopolis, IL**

**HWY23MH017**

**(44 pages)**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: \*

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FATAL TRUCK SEMI-CRASH \*

NEAR TEUTOPOLIS, Illinois \*

Accident No.: HWY23MH017

ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2023 \*

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\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: JACOB BLOEMKER, Driver  
Prairieland Transportation

Brownstown, Illinois

Friday,  
October 6, 2023

APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL FOX, Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

MARK MILLER, Attorney  
Barnes and Thornburg, LLC

JACOB BLOEMKER, Driver  
Prairieland Transportation

RAPHEL MARSHALL, Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

TALISHA BLOEMKER, Secretary  
Prairieland Transportation

I N D E X

ITEM

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Interview of Jacob Bloemker:

By Mr. Fox

5

By Mr. Marshall

6

I N T E R V I E W

(9:18 a.m.)

1  
2  
3 MR. FOX: Good morning, this is Michael Fox, investigator  
4 from the NTSB out of Washington, DC. Today is October 6th, 2023.  
5 We are located at Prairieland Transport at 1532 Illinois Highway  
6 185 in Brownstown, Illinois.

7 Before we begin the interview, we have to ask you Jacob: Do  
8 we have your permission to interview you on tape?

9 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Yes.

10 MR. FOX: Okay, great. Today we'll be interviewing the  
11 driver that was involved in the crash that took place on  
12 September 29th, crash number NTSBHW23MH017.

13 We have several folks in the room. We're going to go ahead  
14 and make an introduction of who each person is. We'll ask you to  
15 say your first name, say your last name, spell your last name if  
16 possible Jacob, and then your title. Counsel, we'll start with  
17 you.

18 MR. MILLER: Thank you. I am Mark Miller, M-i-l-l-e-r, from  
19 the Barnes and Thornburg law firm and I am counsel for Jacob and  
20 for Prairieland Transport.

21 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: My name is Jacob Bloemker, it's  
22 B-l-o-e-m-k-e-r. I am the driver that was involved in the  
23 accident, I'm also a shop foreman here at Prairieland Transport.

24 MR. MARSHALL: My name is Raphael Marshall. Marshall is  
25 M-a-r-s-h-a-l-l. I am an investigator with the National

1 Transportation Safety Board.

2 MS. BLOEMKER: My name is Talisha Bloemker, B-l-o-e-m-k-e-r.  
3 I am Jacob's mother and I'm also secretary for Prairieland  
4 Transport.

5 MR. DON BLOEMKER: Don Bloemker, B-l-o-e-m-k-e-r, owner of  
6 Prairieland Transport, father of Jacob.

7 MR. FOX: Jacob I understand -- thank you for meeting with us  
8 today under such circumstances. I understand you were injured in  
9 the crash; can you tell me what some of your injuries were?

10 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Yeah, on my outward side, I scraped my  
11 shoulder up some, my right shoulder up some. And then I cut my  
12 head I assume, when I was climbing out through the windshield.  
13 Internally, I breathed some of the anhydrous, so the back of my  
14 throat is burned up. And then I've got burns in my eyes as well.

15 MR. FOX: Okay, you actually climbed out of the windshield?

16 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: That is what dad is guessing, so.

17 MR. FOX: Okay.

18 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: I pushed through something on the  
19 passenger's side, so.

20 MR. FOX: Very good. The truck that you were operating, have  
21 you operated that truck before?

22 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Yes.

23 MR. FOX: How many times, many times or --

24 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Many times, yeah.

25 MR. FOX: -- many times.

1 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: I've ran it up and down here just for  
2 shop purposes here at the property and then I hauled anhydrous  
3 with it in the spring. I've hauled some freight loads with it  
4 this year some.

5 MR. FOX: That's your normal truck that you drive?

6 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Correct.

7 MR. FOX: Okay, I'm going to pass it over to Dr. Marshall;  
8 he's going to ask you some other questions.

9 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Okay.

10 MR. MARSHALL: I think that one of the things that our  
11 survival factors investigator would like to know is whether you  
12 had your seatbelt on?

13 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Yes, I had my seatbelt on.

14 MR. MARSHALL: The main reason we're here is just to find out  
15 what your activities were on the day of the crash. So, I'd just  
16 to have you talk us through everything you did on that day  
17 starting with when you woke up. And if you could, provide us with  
18 your activities, the time and location of those activities as  
19 you're going through this. But we'd just like to have you talk  
20 through, in as much detail as possible, what you did that day.

21 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Okay, I woke up between 4:00 and 4:15 I  
22 don't remember exactly, on Friday morning. I had breakfast, got  
23 ready for the day, brushed my teeth, read my Bible, stuff like  
24 that. I left, I don't remember exactly what time I left my house  
25 to get here. I got to Prairieland Transport here in Brownstown.

1 I went out, I pre-tripped my truck, started the truck got it  
2 warming up. I came inside and told dad goodbye, kind of got last-  
3 minute instructions, where I was going in Lima, Ohio. And I left,  
4 I left here around 6:15 in the morning.

5 I bobtailed up to Stewarts in Illinois to pick up the  
6 trailer. I'm kind of a back-up driver, so I don't have a  
7 specified trailer. So that was the closest available, so I went  
8 up to his place, picked up the trailer. I left there 7:30, 7:35  
9 with the trailer empty.

10 I went back from Stewarts and down into Effingham where I got  
11 onto Interstate 70. And then I took 70 to Plainfield, Indiana  
12 which is just the west side of Indianapolis, got off at the rest  
13 area, used the bathroom and then I switched to ag-exempt since it  
14 was an agricultural. From there I drove into Indy at 465 North  
15 and went around town up to 465 East from the north side of Indy  
16 and drove over to 69, Interstate 69, and took Interstate 69 up to  
17 Merion, Indiana where I got onto Highway 18 and drove Highway 18  
18 over to, drove it into Ohio. And when I hit Ohio, that highway  
19 turned to Highway 29. Then I drove there and someone in there, it  
20 turned into Highway 33. I believe that was --

21 MS. BLOEMKER: Wapakoneta? Wapakoneta?

22 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: No.

23 MR. MARSHALL: It doesn't make any difference.

24 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Anyway, turned into Highway 33. I took  
25 that over to Interstate 75 and I drove 75 up to Lima, Ohio which



1 was where the new train terminal was that I loaded. I got there  
2 around 2:00, 2:15 in the afternoon, and that was Eastern time. I  
3 was there 45, 50 minutes. When I left, I drove, followed the same  
4 route back and I stopped at the Intersection of 27 and 18 in  
5 Indiana, there's a little Subway there. So I got a sandwich, that  
6 would have been -- this time is very general, I don't remember  
7 exactly, around 4:00 Eastern time.

8 MR. FOX: Maybe take a drink of water --

9 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Thank you, thank you.

10 MR. FOX: -- loosen your throat.

11 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: I got a sub sandwich -- oh, I forgot, I  
12 had stopped right after I loaded at Lima. I went down the road a  
13 little bit and filled up with fuel and got a snack, a bag of chips  
14 and Mountain Dew and some water. And so then I went, I got Subway  
15 there in Indiana and then once I had my meal, I went ahead and  
16 left and followed the same route back that I had taken going over.

17 When I got into Indy, I hit 465 again headed the opposite  
18 direction, went around the north side, down the west side and then  
19 hit Interstate 70. I switched back to normal log at Plainfield,  
20 Indiana. I don't remember what time that was. So I switched  
21 back, and then as I was heading back somewhere around Terra Haute  
22 I got a call from dad. So I was talking to dad and I talked to  
23 him for 30 or 45 minutes. We were both on the road and just  
24 shooting the bull. And then he also told me that there had been a  
25 wreck on Interstate 70 between Greenup and Effingham and the

1 interstate was shut down. So he advised me to get off at Casey,  
2 Illinois and jump down on 40 and just take 40 to Effingham and  
3 then get back on the interstate there. I was headed home at that  
4 point, can unload the load on Saturday. So, I got off at Casey at  
5 the -- somewhere between the interstate and the four-way stop. I  
6 hung up with dad and then I turned west on 40 and I got through  
7 Casey, Greenup. There's a guy directing traffic at the four-way  
8 in Montrose. I got through Montrose and between Montrose and  
9 Teutopolis, Illinois, that's where the accident happened.

10 MR. FOX: Okay, can you recall just prior to the accident,  
11 what the traffic conditions were like?

12 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: So on Interstate 40, it was very busy,  
13 there was a lot of traffic dodging the wreck on Interstate 70. It  
14 seemed like there would be a gap a mile or two where there was no  
15 traffic and then there would be a huge, long line of bumper-to-  
16 bumper traffic. Somewhere in there, I don't recall exactly where,  
17 I remember somebody coming at me, got impatient and tried to --  
18 and passed when there is very little room between me and them.  
19 So, I actually slowed down at that point to let them have time to  
20 get back in. So, it was just busy and it seemed like there was  
21 some level of impatience with some people. But it was just very  
22 busy, I remember that.

23 MR. FOX: So you saw a car passing you on the left, is that  
24 what you're saying?

25 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: At the time of the accident or prior to?

1 MR. FOX: Yes.

2 MR. MARSHALL: No. I think was as someone was as someone was  
3 heading toward --

4 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: What I was just talking about was prior  
5 to the accident.

6 MR. FOX: Oh this was prior to, I'm sorry. Prior to, okay.

7 MR. MARSHALL: Were there other vehicles that had passed you  
8 during that?

9 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Not that I can remember, yeah.

10 MR. MARSHALL: Okay, what could you describe the lighting  
11 conditions and the environmental conditions around the time of the  
12 crash?

13 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: As far as the weather, it was fairly  
14 clear. It might have been cloudy, I don't know. It was fairly  
15 clear. It was 8:00, 8:30 at night so it was dark. Just your  
16 normal nighttime driving conditions, headlights, so.

17 MR. FOX: Going back to the sequence of the crash, there was  
18 an oncoming vehicle?

19 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Correct.

20 MR. FOX: And then there was, do you recall, a car was trying  
21 to pass you?

22 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Correct.

23 MR. FOX: Can you recall what kind of car that was?

24 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: I can't.

25 MR. FOX: Okay.

1 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: I just, I saw their headlights and then  
2 by the time that they were in, would have been in my range of  
3 vision where I could see, I was occupied keeping my truck under  
4 control. So I don't, I honestly do not remember what kind of car  
5 it was.

6 MR. FOX: Yeah. Can you describe what were your actions next  
7 when that happened?

8 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Describe like when are you talking  
9 about?

10 MR. FOX: When the car passed you.

11 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Okay, so the first -- like I say there's  
12 long lines of traffic coming at me so I was looking ahead and I  
13 saw that one of these lines of traffic, bumper-to-bumper, coming  
14 at me. I looked in my driver's side mirror and I saw a pair of  
15 headlights in the passing lane on this two-lane highway.

16 MR. FOX: Yup.

17 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: I saw them in my mirror. I assumed when  
18 I first saw them that they had just pulled out. I assumed that  
19 they would have seen oncoming traffic and would have pulled back  
20 in behind me.

21 MR. FOX: Yup.

22 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Just you know what a person would  
23 normally do. So, I looked in my mirror. I saw them. I looked  
24 forward, registered where the traffic was. I looked again and  
25 they were still out, still out in the passing lane. And I looked

1 back forward, I mean, I can't tell you exactly how many times I  
2 looked back and forth; two, three times maybe. But there came a  
3 point, I realized, there was no physical way possible that they  
4 would be able to get in front of me or behind me and that was the  
5 point in time I decided that I had to get out of the way and  
6 that's when I took the ditch.

7 MR. FOX: Okay, can you recall what happened next when you  
8 were moving over towards the ditch, can you recall, walk us  
9 through what happened?

10 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: I was moving fairly fast so, like,  
11 events are moving fast. So as far as like what my physical  
12 actions were, I can't remember exactly. I remember the feeling of  
13 my tires hitting the gravel and the grass. Your truck starts  
14 feeling fairly loose.

15 MR. FOX: Yeah.

16 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: So I remember I was trying to get,  
17 control that. I don't -- my dad said he got a hard-braking  
18 notification, so evidently I hit my brakes in there somewhere. I  
19 don't even remember doing that. I remember when I was on the  
20 shoulder, or in the ditch, trying to maintain steerage of the  
21 vehicle, I saw a culvert, like a driveway coming at me.

22 MR. FOX: Right.

23 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: So here's how fast things went: I  
24 blinked, I was in the ditch. Between one blink and the other --

25 MR. FOX: Sure.

1 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: -- I hit that, I assume, I hit that  
2 culvert. I hit something. And I blinked again and I when my  
3 eyelids came up, I registered I was falling over and then from  
4 that point on, it was just riding the crash.

5 MR. FOX: Okay.

6 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Just glass breaking, metal shrieking.  
7 Just a pretty terrible sound.

8 MR. FOX: So, when the vehicle stopped, can you recall, do  
9 you recall getting out of the vehicle?

10 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Yes, I was perfectly aware the entire  
11 time. I knew exactly what was going, well, I felt I was aware the  
12 entire time the vehicle was crashing. I remember flipping, I  
13 think I remember flipping once. I came to a stop, I heard this  
14 funny roar. At first I assumed it sounded like the engine was  
15 malfunctioning of some sort. So the first couple of seconds after  
16 I came to a stop, I was reaching for the key to try to shut the  
17 truck off. But it was a couple of seconds into doing that, I  
18 smelled anhydrous and I knew that my trailer was venting  
19 somewhere.

20 MR. FOX: Right.

21 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Somehow. And so, at that point I knew I  
22 had to get out of the truck. I was laying, driver's side was  
23 laying on the ground, so I knew the ammonia was going to be  
24 gathering on the ground first. So I knew my primary action needed  
25 to be go up. So, I unfastened my seatbelt, I climbed on the side

1 of my seat. Like I said, this was blurry. This is what I'm  
2 pretty sure happened. I climbed on the side of my seat and then  
3 the way of the inside of the truck was, so my dash and the  
4 speedometer and tachometer in front of me and then all the gauges  
5 to the side kind of stuck out into --

6 MR. FOX: Right.

7 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: -- the walkway between the seats. So,  
8 when I was climbing out of the vehicle, I think I stepped on my  
9 seat. And then I stepped on the side of the dash where it stuck  
10 out.

11 MR. FOX: Right.

12 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: And then I tried to open up the  
13 passenger's side door. The door was jammed shut. I couldn't get  
14 it, I thought it was locked, but the locking mechanism wouldn't  
15 move either.

16 MR. FOX: Sure.

17 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Somehow, I don't know if I felt air  
18 movement, if my shoulder in the process of opening the door, moved  
19 the glass. Somehow I sensed that right here, right above and to  
20 the left of my head --

21 MR. FOX: Your head, yeah.

22 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: -- there was a way to get out. And so,  
23 I'm pretty sure I pushed with my head and with my shoulder. And  
24 whatever that object was that was in the way, I pushed it out of  
25 the way. From what dad says, I assume it was the windshield.

1 MR. FOX: You're a strong boy.

2 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Well, it was broke. So, anyway,  
3 whatever it was that I pushed out of the way, I was able to get my  
4 body through. I climbed up on the edge of the cabin, that was the  
5 first time I was able to breathe. So, I sat there for a minute,  
6 and obviously breathed in some pure oxygen. Then I climbed, stood  
7 up on, what would have been the passenger's side of the truck so  
8 where the door, passenger's side door is.

9 I stood up there, I looked down on the ground, I noticed all  
10 the fog, the anhydrous fog, was blowing to the rear of the truck.  
11 So, in front of me, obviously the engine bay and then I saw the  
12 passenger's side steer tire was facing directly upwards. So, I  
13 jumped from the side of the cab onto the passenger's side steer  
14 tire and then from there, there was no fog in the ditch. So I  
15 jumped from there into the ditch and then I ran.

16 MR. FOX: So you ran away from the truck.

17 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Correct. I ran back east, away from the  
18 truck.

19 MR. FOX: East. Up to, on the hard surface road.

20 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: I wasn't on the road. I was running in  
21 the ditch.

22 MR. FOX: Oh, okay.

23 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: On the side of the ditch.

24 MR. FOX: Okay, and then what happened next?

25 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: I ran, as I was going, there was, I'm



1 pretty sure it was a pick up hauling a bumper hitch camper. As I  
2 was running up, the passenger side door opened. The lady, the  
3 passenger got out, she was a lady. She asked me if I was the  
4 driver of the truck. I told her I was and she said she had 9-1-1  
5 on the phone. She had it on speaker phone. So she told the 9-1-1  
6 operator that she had me, the driver, was standing there and then  
7 she held the phone out to me. I don't remember if -- anyway, she  
8 held the phone out to me and I told the 9-1-1 operator, I said,  
9 I've got a massive anhydrous ammonia leak. I need all the water  
10 out here that I can possibly get. And then the lady with the  
11 phone asked the 9-1-1 operator, did you hear that? He said he has  
12 a -- and then she messed up anhydrous ammonia; she mispronounced  
13 it or something. So, I said, no no. I told the 9-1-1 operator, I  
14 said, no I've got a massive anhydrous ammonia leak and I need all  
15 the water out here that we can possibly get. And then, this is  
16 blurry, I think the 9-1-1 operator told the lady to get all the  
17 people to try to evacuate the area.

18 So after she hung up with the 9-1-1 operator, there was four  
19 of them that I can remember; the male and the female that was in  
20 the front of the vehicle and then two boys. I assume they were a  
21 family. We started walking back east along the lines of traffic  
22 and they were telling people to get out, to turn around and to get  
23 out of the area. I remember seeing a, it was like a Saia truck or  
24 an Extra truck, one of those LTL trucks with the double trailers.  
25 I remember climbing up on the passenger side of his truck and

1 telling him to leave and he said well, I can't turn around, I  
2 can't leave my truck. So I just left, I didn't say anything else  
3 to him.

4       There came a point, I don't remember how far I had walked,  
5 there came a point I realized in myself that I was walking further  
6 and further away from the scene and the further I got away, the  
7 harder it was going to be for EMS to find me. So, I told the lady  
8 that I need to sit down and I needed somebody to stay with me so  
9 that they could find me. And so, they all, all four of them kind  
10 of seemed like they stayed fairly close to me at that point and I  
11 sat down in the ditch.

12       It wasn't very long after I asked one of the boys for a cell  
13 phone so I could call my dad. And he went and got his dad's cell  
14 phone and I came back and dialed dad and told him that I had been  
15 in a massive accident and there was anhydrous spraying everywhere,  
16 so.

17       MR. FOX: Raphael.

18       MR. MARSHALL: Do you recall what the speed limit was on 40?

19       MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: That was a 55 area.

20       MR. MARSHALL: And you were going around what?

21       MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: 57 to 58. My speedometer was reading 60  
22 and on your Google maps, that equated to about 57 or 58.

23       MR. MARSHALL: Okay, I think Jacob you've answered most of my  
24 questions about what happened. Mike, do you have?

25       MR. FOX: Well, we wanted to be -- we didn't want to wear out

1 our welcome and we know Jacob is sounding (indiscernible) so.

2 MR. MARSHALL: Yeah.

3 MR. FOX: We have other questions, but if you want, we can do  
4 a Teams call next week with your permission and your attorney's  
5 permission.

6 MR. MILLER: Yeah.

7 MR. FOX: And that way we have a lot of background stuff that  
8 we need to ask you. Very simple questions, you have a copy of the  
9 questions. But I think it's appropriate that we are mindful of  
10 your recovery.

11 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Thank you.

12 MR. FOX: And we didn't want to pressure, put too much stress  
13 on you. So I think, Raphael, do you have any other specific  
14 questions?

15 MR. MARSHALL: No, I think the other questions I have can  
16 wait.

17 MR. FOX: So we'll go ahead and, or did you have anything  
18 pressing on your mind that you wanted to share with us about the  
19 crash?

20 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: I can't think of anything.

21 MR. FOX: Okay.

22 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Yeah.

23 MR. FOX: So at this point we're going to go ahead and  
24 conclude the interview.

25 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Okay.

1 MR. FOX: The time now is 9:40. Thank you, Jacob and  
2 everyone else.

3 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Thank you.

4 (Whereupon, at 9:40 a.m., the interview was concluded.)  
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the  
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

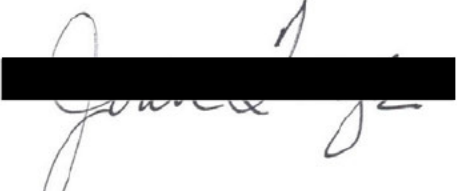
IN THE MATTER OF: FATAL TRUCK SEMI-CRASH  
NEAR TEUTOPOLIS, Illinois  
ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2023  
Interview of John Smith

ACCIDENT NO.: HWY23MH017

PLACE: Brownstown, Illinois

DATE: October 6, 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.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Joan Toryk  
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: \*

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FATAL TRUCK SEMI-CRASH \*

NEAR TEUTOPOLIS, ILLINOIS \* Accident No.: HWY23MH017

ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2023 \*

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\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: JACOB BLOEMKER, Driver

Prairieland Transportation

via Microsoft Teams

Wednesday,  
October 11, 2023

APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL FOX, Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

RAPHAEL MARSHALL, Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

DON BLOEMKER, Owner  
Prairieland Transportation

MARK MILLER, Attorney  
Barnes and Thornburg Law Firm

I N D E X

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I N T E R V I E W

(3:01 p.m.)

1  
2  
3 MR. FOX: Alright, this is Michael Fox, Investigator for the  
4 National Transportation Safety Board out of Washington, DC. Today  
5 is October the 11th, 2023. And on a Teams call, we're going to be  
6 interviewing the driver involved in the Teutopolis, Illinois crash  
7 that took place September the 29th.

8 There are several folks on the call, we'll go around the room  
9 or the screen and identify each person. And we'll ask you to  
10 state your first name, state your last name, spell your last name  
11 and then provide a title. And we'll go ahead and start with Mark,  
12 our attorney.

13 MR. MILLER: Mark Miller, M-i-l-l-e-r, from the Barnes and  
14 Thornburg law firm and I am counsel for Prairieland and its  
15 employees.

16 MR. FOX: And Don?

17 MR. DON BLOEMKER: Don Bloemker, owner of Prairieland. Last  
18 name is B-l-o-e-m-k-e-r.

19 MR. FOX: Jacob?

20 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Jacob Bloemker, last name  
21 B-l-o-e-m-k-e-r. I'm the shop foreman. I was also the driver on  
22 the -- at the time of the crash.

23 MR. FOX: Okay, thank you all again for joining us. Jacob,  
24 for the record, how are you feeling?

25 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: A lot better. I've got some meds from

1 the eye doctor, so my eyes are healing and my voice you can  
2 probably hear, is a lot better.

3 MR. FOX: Yes.

4 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: So we are definitely on the uphill  
5 track, so.

6 MR. FOX: That's good. I'm glad you're on the mend and your  
7 voice is a lot stronger than the last time we spoke with you. So,  
8 thank you for letting us revisit you and just follow up on some of  
9 these questions we didn't get the chance to cover last week.

10 INTERVIEW OF JACOB BLOEMKER

11 BY MR. FOX:

12 Q. So, let's start. When did you get your CDL?

13 A. January of 2021.

14 Q. And did you go to some type of driving school or how did you  
15 get your training?

16 A. I did not attend any official driving school; my dad taught  
17 me. So, I got my commercial learner's permit sometime in early  
18 2020. I was trying to remember the exact date today, but I  
19 couldn't. But I had my learner's permit for six, seven, eight  
20 months. My dad took me out in a bobtail semi. We went out on the  
21 county roads, black tops, and I learned how to shift and operate  
22 the truck on those smaller roads. And then after a while when I  
23 got, kind of got comfortable with the truck, we hooked a trailer  
24 and ran those exact same roads taking off on the hills, stopping  
25 on the hills, just learning how to deal with the truck with

1 traffic on those smaller county roads.

2 And then once dad was comfortable with my driving and I was  
3 comfortable with the truck, I went and took the test at the state  
4 DMV in Charleston, Illinois.

5 Q. Okay, and have you operated any other commercial motor  
6 vehicles besides the ones at Prairieland?

7 A. Not for pay. I did, I was, kind of a -- I don't even -- they  
8 called me a floater. I worked for Ready Mix company out in Tulsa  
9 for a while. So I did operate their concrete trucks around the  
10 yard. But I did not haul any loads for them, I wasn't out on the  
11 road at all for them. It was just mainly from their parking lot  
12 to their shop there on the same property. And then I've operated  
13 an empty propane bobtail truck just from here to a shop and back.  
14 But as far as for pay or under dispatch, I have done no other,  
15 I've driven no other vehicles.

16 Q. When did you start working for Prairieland Transport,  
17 Transportation?

18 A. I was put on the payroll the summer of 2015, so I was 16  
19 years old. Started out just basically washing trailers and  
20 buffing them, so nothing serious. But that was when I started.

21 Q. And then you left and went into the Ready Mix company?

22 A. Yeah, that was -- I moved out there, I think, September of  
23 2021. I was enrolled at Tulsa Welding School so I went out there.  
24 I was out there for probably about eight months on the calendar.  
25 So that's been fairly recent.

1 Q. Okay, once you were hired at Prairieland, did you receive any  
2 safety training or formal training of any kind?

3 A. Yes. So, my first formal training was with Danny Shelton,  
4 he's our business safety consultant. That would have been October  
5 of 2015. We did the general awareness HAZMAT safety training.  
6 And then I also took a training learning how to do the annual VKs  
7 on the trailer.

8 Since then, I've done or I've always been at our annual  
9 safety meetings for the business. Danny has trained us several  
10 times since. And then obviously I've gotten a lot of on-the-job  
11 training with my Dad, so.

12 Q. Okay, so the folks that did the training was either Danny  
13 Shelton or your father?

14 A. Correct.

15 Q. Okay, I understand your primary job is to be the shop  
16 foreman. Did you receive any formal training to be a mechanic?

17 A. Like I said just a minute ago, Danny Shelton trained us on  
18 how to do the VKs and testing the trailers, what to look for as  
19 far as leaks and decals. So that was a formal training that I  
20 received and then, like I said, I've been helping dad with this  
21 stuff for a long time, even prior to when I was hired on, I was  
22 out there watching him do this exact same work. So, I've had a  
23 lot of  
24 on-the-job training watching him do his work, so.

25 Q. What kind of maintenance do you do there in the shop?

1 A. Basically, anything that doesn't have to do with like, brakes  
2 or wheel seals. We do all of our, so all of our annual VK leakage  
3 and visual testing, we do that here. We go, basically what that  
4 entails, we look at all the required decals on the trailer and  
5 make sure they're not faded or shrunk or defaced. We look at all  
6 the piping, all the threads, make sure none of them are leaking.  
7 We check the integrity of the internal valves and secondary  
8 valves, make sure they're not blowing through or leaking of any  
9 type. We look underneath, we make sure there's no rust pits or  
10 dings in the trailer that are less than what the tolerance -- that  
11 are less thickness on what the tolerance for the trailer is. And  
12 then we're just looking at air and electrical and just make sure  
13 that that trailer is safe to go up and down the road.

14 Q. Now, your dad took us on a tour and we saw a trailer that was  
15 missing axels, he said that was one of your projects. So, you do  
16 axel work then too, right?

17 A. Right, yup. So, we've done this for, I don't know, several  
18 trailers now. We've, where we cut the axel off and reweld it to  
19 the bottom of the trailer. So, this particular trailer that  
20 you're talking about, the old axels that were on there were rusted  
21 out and it was no longer safe to be on the road, so I've cut those  
22 old axels off and we have been shining and cleaning up and then  
23 we're -- the steal on the subframe and then we're going to weld  
24 new axels back on where the old ones were.

25 Q. Okay, so just for clarification, you're brake inspector, but

1 you do not do brakes. Is that what I'm hearing?

2 A. Correct, yes. We'll look at them and make sure there's  
3 enough brake pads left. We always -- we adjust them, we grease  
4 them. The grease, the slack adjusters and the S-cams. I always  
5 make sure to look at the wheel seals. But as far as fixing that  
6 stuff, we do not do any of that here. We always take that to a  
7 third-party shop.

8 Q. Do you do oil changes and grease work, or --

9 MR. DON BLOEMKER: No.

10 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: No.

11 BY MR. FOX:

12 Q. Okay, any engine repairs at all?

13 A. No. No.

14 Q. All right, when you're in the shop, do you punch a timecard?

15 A. I've got an Excel spreadsheet, when I clock in in the  
16 morning, I basically just type in what time I clock in to the 15-  
17 minute mark and then I've got a half an hour lunch break, so I  
18 clock what that time is. And then I clock out, or type in what  
19 time I leave, so that's my timecard.

20 Q. All right, does the company have any safety meetings?

21 A. Yes, we have an annual -- every year we have a safety meeting  
22 with all the drivers and myself, all the company personnel.

23 Q. When you're operating, when you're pulling loads for the  
24 company, do you have a specific piece of equipment, a truck  
25 tractor, that you're assigned?

1 Q. The truck I had, was driving on the day of the accident was a  
2 truck that I was assigned to. I do not have a specific trailer  
3 that I'm assigned to. I was kind of a fill-in driver; just  
4 whichever one is available.

5 Q. Is that unit number 17, am I saying that right?

6 A. The trailer or the truck?

7 Q. The truck.

8 A. The truck number was 76.

9 Q. I couldn't read it on the decal, and I didn't see the annual  
10 in any paperwork. I know it was in the truck, according to Danny.  
11 So, it's unit number 76?

12 A. Correct.

13 Q. Okay, I think you said it in your first interview, but it's  
14 on my list, did you do a pre-trip inspection on the vehicle? Both  
15 vehicles?

16 A. did. I did, yup. Now, like I told you earlier, I bobtailed up  
17 to Stewardson. So I did the pre-trip on the truck here at the  
18 home base and then I pre-tripped the trailer once I hooked it in  
19 Stewardson.

20 Q. Did you notice any mechanicals on the pre-trip or any time  
21 during the 29th?

22 A. No, nope. The truck and trailer were running fine.

23 Q. How were you dispatched?

24 A. So, usually we're dispatched with a text the night before.

25 Sometimes since I'm here at the shop every day, sometimes I'm told

1 what load I'm going to be doing just in conversation between dad  
2 and I. But we always get a text on the phone detailing the load  
3 number, where it's getting picked up, where it's going.

4 Q. When you're operating the truck, do you use a logbook or an  
5 electronic log?

6 A. Yes, we use an e-log through Samsara.

7 Q. I know we talked a little bit during the first interview, but  
8 it's my understanding when you're operating the agricultural  
9 exemption, do you mark it a special way on the log? On the e-log?

10 A. Yep. So, the way we work we have two separate log ins. I  
11 have one that's has the hours of service and then I have an exempt  
12 log in. So, when we go on ag-exemption, I would log out of my  
13 normal log and then I would log in to my exempt account.

14 Q. And that records it as off-duty?

15 MR. DON BLOEMKER: Off-duty or sleeper berth.

16 MR. FOX: Yeah, I think that for the 29th, I think it says  
17 off-duty. If my memory serves me right.

18 MR. DON BLOEMKER: Right. Yup.

19 BY MR. FOX:

20 Q. When you're working in the shop, do you have a normal  
21 routine, a normal schedule that you follow?

22 A. Usually I clock in at 7:30. I take, my routine when I get  
23 here, I go out, I turn the lights on in the shop, just get the  
24 shop up and running. And then I'll come into the house where dad  
25 is and we'll kind of sit and discuss what we're going to do for



1 the day, kind of have that, what they call a tool box  
2 conversation; just kind of talking about what's on the schedule  
3 for the day, kind of where we're going to head. And then, that's  
4 usually half an hour, 45-minutes and then we'll head back out to  
5 the shop and just get going. And then I typically quit between  
6 4:00 and 5:00 each day with a half an hour lunch break at some  
7 point midday.

8 Q. So how many hours do you think you work a week, then.

9 A. Usually 40 to 45.

10 Q. And how frequently are you paid?

11 A. Once a week.

12 Q. When you're running for the company, operating the truck, do  
13 you run the same route?

14 A. No. Nope, just whatever dad feels is best for the day,  
15 that's where I go.

16 Q. And the route that you were running the day of the crash on  
17 the 29th, had you run that route before?

18 A. I have been over most of that route before, not always with a  
19 commercial vehicle. But my grandparents live north of Montrose  
20 and then I have grandparents east of Indianapolis a couple of  
21 hours. I had either in a commercial vehicle or in my own personal  
22 vehicle, I have been over that route, most of that route before,  
23 multiple times.

24 MR. FOX: Okay, very good. That's all the questions that I  
25 have at the moment. Dr. Marshall will follow up with some other

1 additional questions.

2 BY MR. MARSHALL:

3 Q. Yeah, I don't have too many more questions, but I do have to  
4 go through the 72-hour history with you. So, I think we went  
5 through the history for the day of the crash. But, if possible, I  
6 don't know how much you remember of the days before, but we'll,  
7 I'll have to ask you about those as well. But to start off, one  
8 of my questions is are you taking any prescription drugs at the  
9 moment?

10 A. No.

11 Q. Okay, are you taking any over-the-counter medications as a  
12 sleep aid or for allergies or anything like that?

13 A. I do take Zyrtec and Flonase as needed for seasonal  
14 allergies. And then I take a cod liver oil food supplement. So,  
15 but that's all I take.

16 Q. Okay --

17 A. And I will say this, sorry. I will say this, prior to, like  
18 the week prior to the crash, I had had a cold of some sort, so I  
19 don't remember the exact timeline, but prior to the crash I had  
20 been taking Dayquil just as needed just to kind of help mitigate  
21 cold symptoms, so.

22 Q. Okay, and when was the last time you took that, do you  
23 remember?

24 A. I don't remember. It probably was a day or two prior, yup.

25 Q. Okay, do you consume alcohol or recreational drugs and if so,

1 when was the last time that you took those?

2 A. No, I don't drink or do drugs, so.

3 Q. Okay, per your sleeping habits, do you have a hard time  
4 falling asleep or are you, I mean could you just describe that to  
5 me? Like how well you sleep?

6 A. Yeah, I typically don't have any trouble at all falling  
7 asleep. Usually within five to 10 minutes of laying down, I'm  
8 asleep. I usually feel refreshed when I wake up and I usually get  
9 six to seven hours of sleep a night.

10 Q. Okay, you mentioned that you were on the phone with your, or  
11 you were communicating with your father during your trip. Could  
12 you tell me how you communicate with your father or other  
13 individuals on your trip while you're driving?

14 A. Yup, usually it's over phone call and I've got a Bluetooth  
15 that I use when I'm driving. So that was how I had talked to my  
16 father, just on that Bluetooth.

17 Q. And could you describe the technology in your cab and how you  
18 interact with that technology? Such as ELDs or anything like  
19 that.

20 A. Yes, so we have a Samsara dashcam and tracker. I usually  
21 don't interact with those at all. With my personal technology, I  
22 had my tablet with me, that was running my ELD. I also had Google  
23 Maps and Pandora running on that tablet as well. And then I had  
24 my personal phone with me in the cab.

25 MR. MARSHALL: Okay, Mike, that's all the questions I had. I

1 was just going to go to the 72-hour history. Do you have anything  
2 that you wanted to? Okay.

3 BY MR. FOX:

4 Q. Well, let me, if I can interject before I forget, Jacob, we  
5 were going through the scenario of when the crash occurred and  
6 after you exited the vehicle and got up onto the hard surface  
7 road. I think there was an exchange where you met up with some  
8 people. Can you elaborate on that?

9 A. Yes, we actually found out they have been in contact with my  
10 dad since the crash and we found out their last name is Lakey.  
11 They're from Cassville, Missouri.

12 Basically, as I was running-slash-walking away from the  
13 crash, I was walking up by their vehicle and the passenger side  
14 door opened and she got out, the lady of the vehicle got out,  
15 asked me if I was the driver. I told her I was. She told me she  
16 had 9-1-1 on the phone and she held, she had 9-1-1 on  
17 speakerphone, and she held the phone out to me, told the 9-1-1  
18 operator that the driver was here, me. And she held the phone out  
19 to me. So, I told the 9-1-1 operator that there was a massive  
20 anhydrous ammonia leak and that I needed all the water out here  
21 that I could possibly get. The lady that owned the phone, this  
22 Lakey, she brought the phone back and asked the 9-1-1 operator did  
23 you understand that? And then she mispronounced anhydrous  
24 ammonia, so I repeated myself again into the phone. I said, no.  
25 I said we've got a massive anhydrous ammonia leak and I need all

1 the water out here that I can possibly get.

2 And then that was, I don't remember the exact exchange from  
3 the 9-1-1 operator, but as soon as they hung up the phone, the  
4 Lakeys started walking back down the road, telling people to leave  
5 the scene and evacuate.

6 Q. Okay, was there any other person that you came in contact, or  
7 people that you came in contact with out on the hard surface road?

8 A. There was, as I was walking away, I was hacking and coughing  
9 and dry heaving so I didn't talk to people a whole lot. There was  
10 one semi-truck, it was either a Saia or an Extra, one of those LTL  
11 haulers. I did climb up on the side of his cab and tell him to  
12 leave. He said that he couldn't turn around with his truck, so I  
13 just left. I didn't talk to him anymore. But then the next  
14 people that I talked to aside from the Lakey family was, there was  
15 a police officer that showed up, so.

16 Q. Okay, now was there a mention that, was it the Lakeys that  
17 had noticed the driver trying to cut you off, was there any  
18 dialogue about that?

19 A. Not to me personally, but they have been in contact with my  
20 dad and I believe the state police after the scene. They had said  
21 that this particular driver had passed them prior to passing me  
22 and that they had almost been in a head-on collision when they  
23 passed their vehicle as well. So, it wasn't the first time that  
24 they had pulled a maneuver like they did on me.

25 MR. FOX: Okay, very good.

1 MR. MARSHALL: Do you know where the Lakeys were positioned  
2 behind your truck? Was it, like, how far behind your truck were  
3 they?

4 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: I honestly, I don't remember how far  
5 back they were. It didn't seem like they were the next one in  
6 line behind me because I remember walking passed several vehicles  
7 before I got to them, but I don't remember how many vehicles I  
8 walked past before I got to theirs.

9 MR. FOX: They were probably behind the Old Dominion doubles?

10 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: I remember seeing a truck like an Old  
11 Dominion truck and so they were behind them. But like I said, I  
12 don't remember exact details of where they were positioned.

13 MR. FOX: Okay, very good. Well, that was the only other  
14 follow-up question I had right now. But, yeah, you can proceed.

15 MR. MARSHALL: Okay, I did have a question for Don. Who have  
16 you been in contact with with the Illinois state police when it  
17 comes to the Lakeys and just so I know who to speak with. Was it  
18 Brad?

19 MR. DON BLOEMKER: Jeremy and Brad, both. I think they're  
20 reconstructionists, so both of them should have that information.

21 MR. MARSHALL: Okay, yeah I planned to get in touch with them  
22 today.

23 BY MR. MARSHALL:

24 Q. What I'd like to do is we've already talked about Friday the  
25 day of the crash. But if you can remember, one of things that we

1 always do is we always reconstruct the 72-hour history for  
2 everyone who is involved in the crash. So, I just wondered if you  
3 could walk me through your days before the crash. If we could  
4 start with September 26. I don't know if you remember much about  
5 that day, but if you could go through it the same way we went  
6 through the 29th where you had described the time, your activity  
7 and the location of that activity.

8 A. Yup, so I've kind of written down as much as I can. I knew  
9 this question was coming. So, I'm just going to read off what I  
10 have. On Tuesday, September 26th, I would have awakened somewhere  
11 around 5:45am. I awakened, I was good and rested. So, I woke up.  
12 When I wake up, my morning routine, I read and pray, brush my  
13 teeth, shave, comb my hair and then eat breakfast. And I usually  
14 leave my house around 6:45, give or take a few minutes. When I  
15 got to work, it was 7:30 in the morning. My daily task that day,  
16 I was, we were talking about trailer 25 getting ready new axels  
17 for it. So, on that particular day, I was cleaning old paint and  
18 rust off of that trailer and just getting the welding surface  
19 ready to weld.

20 I ended work that day around 5:00pm. My mom was sick, so I  
21 came in and I helped my brothers and some friends that were here  
22 cook supper that night. And then I hung out here at my mom and  
23 dad's place and went home afterwards. I got home and I went to  
24 bed somewhere around 10:30 p.m. on Tuesday night.

25 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Am I doing okay as far as constructing

1 the day?

2 MR. MARSHALL: Yeah, thank you.

3 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Okay, yup. So, Wednesday, September  
4 27th again I woke up somewhere around 5:45 a.m. I woke rested,  
5 good and rested. My morning routine was the same: Read and  
6 prayed, ate breakfast, brushed my teeth, combed my hair, shaved.  
7 Once again, I left around 6:45 in the morning, got to work 7:30.

8 My task that day, I was finishing cleaning up the welding  
9 surface on trailer 25 getting the paint and the rust out of the  
10 way, getting it down to shiny metal. And then at the end of,  
11 towards the end of that, later half of that day, we started making  
12 some additional braces to go inside of 25. So, I started into  
13 more of the cutting and fabricating side of the project, and I got  
14 one new brace welded onto the trailer. That night I ended work  
15 around 4:30 or so. I left from here, went to Sonic and got some  
16 supper and then we had bible study at 7:00 p.m. Wednesday night.  
17 And then I would have went to bed somewhere around 9:30, 10:00  
18 Wednesday night.

19 Thursday morning, once again I woke up 5:45 in the morning.  
20 I was good and rested when I woke up. My morning routine is the  
21 same as before: Read and prayed, breakfast, brushed teeth, shave,  
22 comb my hair. On -- no I'm sorry, that was on Friday morning.  
23 So, I left my place at 6:45 give or take on Thursday morning, got  
24 to work at 7:30. And so on Thursday, my entire day was welding  
25 and fabricating on trailer 25. So, I finished making those braces



1 and finished welding them into place. I ended work somewhere  
2 around 5:15 on Thursday. I had supper here at mom and dad's. We  
3 had some, some of our ministers, couple of our ministers were  
4 here. So, one is like a brother to me, so we hung out here at mom  
5 and dad's place. I played Mario Karts until around 8:00 p.m. with  
6 them.

7       Around 8:00 p.m. I learned of this load that I needed to take  
8 on Friday and so I left here and I would have gotten to bed  
9 somewhere around 10:00 p.m. on Thursday night. And on Friday  
10 morning, I woke up 4:15 which we've been here before. Morning,  
11 yup, so.

12       MR. MARSHALL: Well, thank you.

13       MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: Yup.

14       MR. MARSHALL: I think Mike, that's the questions I had.

15       MR. FOX: Okay, it's possible those are all the questions I  
16 have as well. It's possible we may have some follow-up questions  
17 and if necessary, we could do this again. Oh, Raphael has another  
18 one. Go ahead Raphael.

19       BY MR. MARSHALL:

20 Q. Yeah, I'm sorry. Like the last time we spoke with you, you  
21 mentioned that I guess there was some traffic at times and you had  
22 mentioned that -- I guess I just wanted clarification on this.  
23 This is prior to the crash you said that another vehicle had  
24 passed, I'm not really sure, that they passed you from the  
25 opposite side or -- I mean, like they tried to do a passing

1 maneuver from the opposite lane or were doing a passing maneuver  
2 from your lane in front of you. Do you remember what I'm talking  
3 about? You said that there was another vehicle prior to the --

4 A. Yes. I do remember.

5 Q. Could you describe because I wasn't really sure what you  
6 were, you know, what the situation was.

7 A. Yes, I don't remember exactly where it was in conjunction  
8 with the scene of the accident. But what I was talking about is  
9 the oncoming traffic. There was traffic coming at me and I  
10 noticed as I was driving that in that line of oncoming traffic,  
11 another vehicle tried to, or did pass the vehicle in front of  
12 them. And that the distance between myself and that vehicle  
13 trying to pass was a little close, close for comfort for me so I  
14 had to slow, I slowed down to allow them to have time to get back  
15 into their lane. So that was all in the oncoming traffic side.

16 Q. So, the traffic on both sides of 40 east bound and west  
17 bound, were they both heavy or, I guess my question is was I-70  
18 completely closed that day or was it just west bound lanes that  
19 were closed? Would you remember?

20 A. I believe it was completely closed. That was what I was  
21 told, so.

22 Q. Okay, so could you describe the traffic on both sides then,  
23 like both west bound and east bound on US 40?

24 A. East bound was very heavy. I don't remember exactly what my  
25 side was. I don't remember that there was any traffic in front of

1 me. But it was, I'm pretty sure it was fairly heavy as well.

2 MR. MARSHALL: Okay. All right, thanks Mike.

3 MR. FOX: Okay, well as I said a moment ago, I'm sure there  
4 may be some additional questions. We can perhaps use this venue  
5 again or just, you know, I can send Mark email and Don and we can  
6 get some clarification. We're still trying to sift through all  
7 the paperwork and there will be some additional questions.

8 And Jacob, you've had, you know, quite a bit of time to  
9 reflect on anything. Is there anything that we did not ask you or  
10 anything that's on your mind that you wanted to let us know about  
11 before we conclude the interview?

12 MR. JACOB BLOEMKER: One thing I did remember, we were  
13 reconstructing that Friday. I did stop at a rest area on  
14 Interstate 75, I'm trying to think of the exit number. I think  
15 it's like 112 on Interstate 75. I did pull off at the rest area  
16 there, I forgot to mention that the other day. But as far as  
17 other than that, I can't remember any, I don't think, I can't  
18 think of anything else that I need to add.

19 MR. FOX: Okay, well you can always reach out to us if  
20 something else pops up. So, we really appreciate everyone's time.  
21 Jacob, we wish you a speedy recovery and continued strength. And  
22 if there's not, no one else has anything to add, we're going to go  
23 ahead and conclude the interview and the time is now 3:33 p.m.  
24 eastern.

25 (Whereupon, at 3:33 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the  
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD


IN THE MATTER OF: FATAL TRUCK SEMI-CRASH  
NEAR TEUTOPOLIS, ILLINOIS  
ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2023  
Interview of Jacob Bloemker

ACCIDENT NO.: HWY23MH017

PLACE: via Microsoft Teams

DATE: October 11, 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.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Joan Toryk  
Transcriber