

# TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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Investigation of: )  
SEPTA Fire ) Accident No.: RRD25FR006  
)

Interview of: DOUG ASKEW, Engineer Trainee

Pages: 1 through 23  
Place: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
Date: September 26, 2025

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**HERITAGE REPORTING CORPORATION**  
*Official Reporters*





## APPEARANCES:

TODD KRAHOLIK, NTSB Assistant IIC

RICHARD SHERRY, Federal Railroad Administration  
(FRA)

YULE RODRIGUEZ, Director of Railroad Ops

RICH MAHON, Assistant Chief Officer, SEPTA  
Railroad Operations

JOSE ZAYAS, Service Manager, Operations

DON HILL, Observer

JEFF THOMPSON, Senior Director, Railroad Vehicle  
Maintenance

RAYMOND BOYER, General Chairman, SMART Local 61

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1                                    P R O C E E D I N G S

2                    MR. KRAHOLIK: Hi. My name's Todd Kraholik. I  
3 am the NTSB Assistant IIC for this accident. We're  
4 here today on September 26, 2025, in Philadelphia,  
5 Pennsylvania, conducting an interview with Doug Askew,  
6 who works for SEPTA.

7                    This is -- this interview is in conjunction with  
8 NTSB's investigation of a fire that happened on  
9 September 25, 2025, at Gravers Station. The NTSB  
10 Accident Reference Number is RRD25FR006.

11                   Before we begin our interview and questions,  
12 let's go around the table and introduce ourselves.  
13 Please spell your last name, who you represent, and  
14 your title.

15                   I'd like to remind everybody please speak clearly  
16 so we can get an accurate recording.

17                   I'll start off and will pass to my right this  
18 time.

19                   Again, my name is Todd Kraholik. The spelling of  
20 my last name is K-R-A-H-O-L-I-K. And I am the NTSB  
21 Assistant IIC.

22                   MR. SHERRY: Rick Sherry. Last name's spelled  
23 S-H-E-R-R-Y. FRA. I actually own this investigation.

24                   MR. RODRIGUEZ: Yule Rodriguez, Director of  
25 Railroad Ops. R-O-D-R-I-G-U-E-Z.

1 MR. MANN: Rich Mahon, Assistant Chief Officer,  
2 SEPTA Railroad Operations. M-A-H-O-N.

3 MR. ZAYAS: Jose Zayas. Last name Z-A-Y-A-S.  
4 Service Manager, Operations.

5 MR. HILL: Don Hill, Observer, H-I-L-L.

6 MR. BOYER: Raymond Boyer, General Chairman,  
7 SMART Local 61. B-O-Y-E-R.

8 MR. ASKEW: Doug Askew, Engineer Trainee. Last  
9 name A-S-K-E-W.

10 MR. THOMPSON: Jeff Thompson, T-H-O-M-P-S-O-N.  
11 Senior Director, Railroad Vehicle Maintenance.

12 MR. KRAHOLIK: All right. Thanks, everybody.

13 Doug, you understand that we're going to record  
14 this discussion with you today?

15 MR. ASKEW: Yes, sir.

16 MR. KRAHOLIK: And do you understand the  
17 transcripts will be part of a public docket and, as  
18 such, we can't guarantee any confidentiality?

19 MR. ASKEW: Yes.

20 MR. KRAHOLIK: All right. And as we discussed,  
21 you have a representative today, is that correct?

22 MR. ASKEW: Yes.

23 MR. KRAHOLIK: That's Ray?

24 MR. ASKEW: Yeah.

25 MR. KRAHOLIK: All right. Everybody please

1 clearly announce your name and title before  
2 questioning.

3 INTERVIEW OF DOUG ASKEW

4 BY MR. KRAHOLIK:

5 Q Doug, can you give us a synopsis of your work  
6 experience, taking us up to your present job and how  
7 long you've been doing it?

8 A Since high school, I guess, I mean, I worked  
9 retail jobs mostly a year or two years. Joined the  
10 Post Office after I graduated high school. And after  
11 the Post Office, I worked a year there, then I came  
12 here. Yeah. And, currently, I'm going through a  
13 training program to become an engineer.

14 Q What --

15 A At this point, I've been with the company for  
16 almost two years, a year and 10 months.

17 Q And when did you start the engineer training  
18 program?

19 A I started the program --

20 Q Roughly if you don't remember.

21 A -- around April and some change.

22 Q April of this year?

23 A Yes.

24 Q Okay. And before you were assistant conductor?

25 A Yes, sir.

1 Q And then did you do conductor as well?

2 A No.

3 Q No. Assistant conductor right to engineer  
4 training basically?

5 A Yes, sir.

6 Q Okay. Gotcha. And let's talk about the  
7 training. I'm not familiar with SEPTA's engineer  
8 training. Kind of walk me through what you've been  
9 through so far, like how many weeks in the classroom  
10 or whatever.

11 A So, for the engineer training portion at SEPTA,  
12 you start off with a training train, which is four  
13 weeks. The first week isn't graded. You just go out  
14 to a few different lines, operating -- you're in it  
15 with two instructors the whole time just learning how  
16 to operate the train, apply rules, and apply, like,  
17 your speed exceptions, knowledge of that nature.

18 And then, after that, you go straight to OJT,  
19 where you will be with a qualified engineer who is  
20 also qualified on teaching, and you will be assigned  
21 to whatever run they have for the pick, work alongside  
22 them. You operate the train. They monitor you while  
23 you operate the train, make sure you're in compliance  
24 with rules and exceptions and temporary speed  
25 restrictions or supplemental closing orders. Yeah.

1 Q Do you know how long that OJT is, how many weeks  
2 you're going to be in it, do you know?

3 A Typically, from what I've been informed, the OJT  
4 process was or should be eight weeks, but I know it  
5 can go longer.

6 Q So it's supposed to be eight weeks. And what  
7 week are you at?

8 A This is currently week seven.

9 Q Week seven, all right. Is there a test, do you  
10 know, when you're done? Like, is there a test they  
11 put on you?

12 A Yes. A promotion final, which is about four  
13 days, testing your operating skills, compliance of  
14 that nature, correct knowledge of signals, signal  
15 progression, as well as -- yeah, I think that's it.

16 Q Okay. On September 25, the day of the fire, can  
17 you kind of talk to me about that day? Kind of tell  
18 me how your day started and where you got the train  
19 and all that kind of stuff.

20 A The day started out at Trenton. Report time was  
21 4:25. Got there. Checked slips. Checked sills.  
22 Took off hand brakes and all stuff for the east and  
23 west end. Did a running -- or did a brake test, left  
24 at leaving time after we called out, brought the train  
25 in. Went to the train into the city. Went straight

1 to the Hill East. There wasn't really any issues.

2 Q So you didn't have any issues throughout that  
3 trip?

4 A No.

5 Q And then, so how did you hear about the smoke or  
6 fire or anything like that?

7 A I was informed from the conductor.

8 Q And that was done over the radio?

9 A That was done in person, face to face.

10 Q He came up to the front and talked to you?

11 A Yeah.

12 Q I got you. So were you already in the station  
13 when the fire happened?

14 A Yes.

15 Q Then passengers were off and on, and then the  
16 conductor came up and said, hey, there's a fire back  
17 there?

18 A Yes.

19 Q I got you. Okay. And you were running the whole  
20 time?

21 A Yes.

22 Q Did you do the brake test in the morning?

23 A Yes.

24 Q Okay. When you got this train, it was in the  
25 shop? Was that where you got on it, was in Trenton,

1 was in the shop? Was that where it's at?

2 A It was on 5 Track, that train, down there.

3 Q Okay. So that's not a -- that's like a station,  
4 the end of the station?

5 A A station track.

6 Q I got you. Gotcha. And did anybody meet you  
7 there when you got on the train as far as mechanical  
8 or train master or anybody?

9 A No, it was just the crew.

10 Q Okay. And when you got on, was there any issues  
11 on the train that you knew of?

12 A No.

13 Q Okay. If there is issues with the train and you  
14 get on it, is there, like, a slip or something on the  
15 stand or something, I would assume?

16 A Yeah. Yeah. A air brake slip, ATC/PTC slip.

17 Q And if there was any issues, it would be with  
18 that? Is that how you'd find out there was an issue?  
19 Or since this was the first trip of the day, you would  
20 expect no issues or --

21 A That, or light indicators would only be the way  
22 to determine, like, issues.

23 Q Okay. And there was no indicators on this train?  
24 Was there any light indicators on?

25 A Yes, there were. Well, like, they weren't on,

1 but, like, if they're --

2 RAY: Can I consult with him?

3 MR. KRAHOLIK: We can stop.

4 (Discussion held off the record.)

5 BY MR. KRAHOLIK:

6 Q So, on this one, was there any lights on?

7 A No, there were no lights illuminated before.

8 Q And I don't really know what the -- is there a  
9 difference in illuminated and on, or is it -- like,  
10 when I asked you if there was no lights on, you were  
11 like do you mean illuminated? Is there another way it  
12 could be? And I'm only asking because I have no idea.  
13 Is there a difference in there? Would a light be  
14 on -- illuminated means there's a problem? Or is  
15 there another way the light, you can know there's a  
16 problem on or something?

17 A So --

18 RAY: You want to talk? Can we --

19 MR. KRAHOLIK: You need to pause?

20 RAY: Yeah.

21 (Discussion held off the record.)

22 BY MR. KRAHOLIK:

23 Q All right. So, on the day when you got on the  
24 train, was there a light on that dash?

25 A No.

1 Q Or whatever, the console. And so you've been a  
2 trainee for seven weeks now, on-the-job training.

3 A Yes.

4 Q How often are you getting on trains with lights  
5 on? Is that a common problem?

6 A No.

7 Q Is it a common problem for the lights to come on  
8 as you run, or have you, since you -- and I don't want  
9 to know about -- I only want to know when you're --  
10 since you've been training, have you had a problem  
11 with lights?

12 A When I'm at the stand, no, I don't have a problem  
13 with lights.

14 Q Okay. So, if there's a new procedure that SEPTA  
15 wants to happen or a new procedure to take place, how  
16 do you get that procedure?

17 A Typically, through bulletin orders or division  
18 notices, supplementals.

19 Q And how do you get that stuff?

20 A I get physical copies. I do check the tablet.  
21 But I prefer the physicals.

22 Q And is that something you print up or they're  
23 already sitting somewhere for you to just grab them?

24 A They're already sitting, like, usually report  
25 locations, downtown, suburban. Every report location

1 has them.

2 Q So, since you started OJT, has there been a new  
3 bulletin, like a new procedure been implemented that  
4 everybody's talking about recently? Is there --

5 A Yeah.

6 Q And what is that?

7 A It's a notice in reference to the dynamic brake  
8 light that, like, what you should do or how you  
9 should, like, treat it in what regards in instances.

10 Q And talk to me about what's your understanding,  
11 what you're supposed to do if you have a light on or a  
12 light comes on.

13 A So there's instances where, like, as the engineer  
14 where, when you're operating, if you're not, like,  
15 taking heavy bites of air, that light might come on,  
16 but usually it'll go off if you take more air, put  
17 more brake on. And there's instances where, if it  
18 stays illuminated, it would have to -- you would have  
19 to make two consecutive station stops and the track  
20 speed would have to be over 30 miles per hour. But  
21 you would report that, like, location of the location  
22 and speed you were going to dispatch.

23 Q So, if you get a -- and, again, I'm not familiar,  
24 so I don't know, but -- so is that light not  
25 considered on if you don't do two station stops and 30

1 miles an hour? Or you still, it's still like the  
2 lights, you've still got to act on this light and call  
3 it in?

4 A So, like I said, if you, you know, take a small  
5 application of brake and it comes on and you take more  
6 and it goes off, then you're okay, proceed normal. If  
7 I guess you were to make a station stop with the  
8 amount of brake that you needed on and that light  
9 stayed illuminated, then I'd say report that at that  
10 moment and then go your two station stops exceeding 30  
11 miles an hour, and if it's continuously on through  
12 that whole running process, then you would call it in  
13 again with your location and speed.

14 Q Is there anything else you have to do when you  
15 call it in? Like, is there any paperwork you're got  
16 to fill out or anything?

17 A I believe -- I don't know.

18 Q Okay. And when that bulletin came out, were you  
19 already a engineer trainee, or were you still a  
20 assistant conductor at the time?

21 A I was an engineer trainee.

22 Q Okay. So did you understand that bulletin  
23 completely? Like, when you read it, being an engineer  
24 trainee, like, you totally understood what it was  
25 saying, or did you have to get clarification or --

1 A I asked for clarification.

2 Q And who did you ask?

3 A A promoted engineer.

4 Q Promoted engineer? Okay. Since you've been here

5 two years, like, if you have questions with the

6 bulletins, do you go right to somebody else, like a

7 conductor? Since you're an engineer trainee, you

8 would just go to a qualified engineer? Is that kind

9 of what you would do?

10 A Yeah.

11 Q Would you ever reach out to a SEPTA manager at

12 all?

13 A I would, yeah.

14 Q And how do you get a hold of a SEPTA manager, do

15 you know?

16 A All their, like, office numbers are listed. You

17 can reach out. Yeah.

18 Q Okay. And on the bottom of those bulletins, if

19 it says, like, to get further clarification call this

20 number, is there something like that on the bottom of

21 the bulletin that you know of?

22 A I never pay much attention to that. I do know

23 there's --

24 Q I got you. Okay. In your two years here, have

25 you ever got compliance tested? I think you guys are

1 calling it operational testing. Have you had that  
2 happen?

3 A Yeah, yeah.

4 Q Do they tell you whether you pass or fail, or is  
5 it only your failures or only your passes, or do you  
6 know?

7 A I've never failed one.

8 Q Okay. So they come up and talk to you and tell  
9 you you did good, you passed or whatever?

10 A They ask you questions. If you're able to answer  
11 them or --

12 Q So do you assume you passed, or do they tell you  
13 you passed? Like, if they ask you a question, you  
14 knew the answer and you answered it, would you just  
15 say you passed, or do they say, good job, you knew the  
16 answer, that's correct, or --

17 A They typically tell me that, yeah, I'm good.

18 Q I got you. I got you. Do you see many managers  
19 out and about?

20 A Yeah. Yeah.

21 Q Have you had to fill out one of these MP-11's  
22 since you've been an engineer trainee? Have you  
23 filled one out?

24 A Not myself personally. I filled them out in  
25 training, like during the process, learning how to do

1 it.

2 Q Okay. So they do teach you how to fill it out?

3 A Yeah.

4 MR. KRAHOLIK: I got you. Okay. I don't have  
5 any further questions. I'll pass it.

6 BY MR. THOMPSON:

7 Q During any time of your ride from Trenton to  
8 Gravers, did you guys --

9 MR. KRAHOLIK: Announce your name.

10 MR. THOMPSON: I'm sorry. Jeff Thompson,  
11 Railroad Mechanic with SEPTA.

12 BY MR. THOMPSON:

13 Q From when you guys picked up the train until the  
14 incident at Gravers, at any time, did you guys smell  
15 any smoke?

16 A No.

17 MR. THOMPSON: Okay. All right. No further  
18 questions.

19 MR. ZAYAS: All right. Service Manager Jose  
20 Zayas.

21 BY MR. ZAYAS:

22 Q Okay. So I have a question here. Prior to the  
23 training train, did you receive training on rules and  
24 equipment troubleshooting?

25 A Yes.

1 Q All right. Did that include recognizing and  
2 troubleshooting fault lights?

3 A Yes.

4 MR. ZAYAS: Okay. Jose Zayas. No further  
5 questions.

6 MR. SHERRY: FRA, Rick Sherry.

7 BY MR. SHERRY:

8 Q In your on-the-job training, you're in week seven  
9 of on-the-job training, correct?

10 A Yes.

11 Q Okay. How many different locomotive engineers  
12 have you worked with in those seven weeks?

13 A Seven.

14 Q Seven? You take one week, and that's who you  
15 work with for the week?

16 A Yeah.

17 Q All right. During that time, I know you  
18 discussed it in classroom training and everything like  
19 that. On your on-the-job training, has any engineer  
20 sat with you in the cab, gone over every instrument,  
21 what it means, and what it does, or do they just  
22 expect you to know?

23 A I mean, I already do know because of the  
24 equipment class.

25 Q Okay. So, at the start of the week, they don't

1 say, hey, what do you know, what you don't know? They  
2 just throw you in the seat and you have at it?

3 A Well, they ask questions, like, generally as  
4 you're, like, operating the line, if you know this, if  
5 you know that.

6 Q Okay. And that instrument panel, from the hand  
7 brake light, fault light, DBL light, do they -- has  
8 anyone on-the-job training ever gone over that with  
9 you as you go through the last seven engineers that  
10 you worked with?

11 A I'm sorry, could you repeat the question?

12 Q Not a problem. In the last seven weeks, the  
13 seven engineers you worked with, once you sit in the  
14 seat, has any engineer on on-the-job training gone  
15 over the light instrument panel where, you know, the  
16 doors open, the hand brake light, the fault light, the  
17 DBL light, has anybody ever gone over that section of  
18 your instrument panel with you, on-the-job training?  
19 Not in the training classroom but on-the-job training.

20 A Right. Yeah.

21 Q Okay.

22 A Yeah. They've asked questions, do I know what  
23 this is, that, whatever.

24 Q Okay.

25 A Can I do this if this isn't illuminated or

1       whatever, yeah.

2               MR. SHERRY: All right. No further questions.

3               MR. KRAHOLIK: All right. Todd Kraholik, NTSB.

4               BY MR. KRAHOLIK:

5       Q       Since you've been a engineer trainee, have you  
6       ever had a light come on and the engineer said just  
7       unscrew it a little bit and that light will go out?  
8       Have you ever seen that happen?

9       A       No.

10      Q       Has -- when you got on an engine and the light's  
11      off, has any engineer said, like, we need to check to  
12      make sure there's no fault and tell you to screw the  
13      bulb in or anything? Have you ever heard anything  
14      like that, any talk of that?

15      A       They always tell me check for cab makeup, so that  
16      includes pushing the lights in --

17      Q       Okay. So --

18      A       -- and that they do actually illuminate.

19              MR. KRAHOLIK: Okay. I don't have any further  
20      questions.

21              MR. THOMPSON: I have one more.

22              BY MR. THOMPSON:

23      Q       Were there any, like --

24              MR. THOMPSON: Sorry. Jeff Thompson, SEPTA.

25      //

1 BY MR. THOMPSON:

2 Q Were there any train handling indications that  
3 there was any problem with the train when you were  
4 operating it?

5 A No.

6 Q All right. Nothing felt weird, like it was  
7 dragging or surging or anything like that?

8 A Uh-uh.

9 MR. THOMPSON: Okay. All right. Thank you. No  
10 other questions.

11 MR. ZAYAS: Jose Zayas, Service Manager. I've  
12 got no further questions.

13 MR. KRAHOLIK: I'm going to ask you one.  
14 Normally, I don't, but do you feel like -- Todd  
15 Kraholik, NTSB.

16 BY MR. KRAHOLIK:

17 Q When Jeff asked you was there any jerking or  
18 train handling, like, do you feel being an operator  
19 for seven weeks, do you feel like you would understand  
20 what each thing moves? Like, do you have a feeling  
21 for that already you think?

22 A Yeah. I've got -- I've been on a bunch of  
23 different equipment. Like, I can tell when, like,  
24 especially, like, by my third stop, like, what the  
25 consist is doing or not doing that I'm working with.

1 MR. KRAHOLIK: Okay, I got you.

2 All right. Do you have any questions or anything  
3 you'd like to add for this to us?

4 MR. ASKEW: No.

5 MR. KRAHOLIK: Is there anything we should have  
6 asked you that we didn't?

7 MR. ASKEW: I don't know.

8 MR. KRAHOLIK: All right. If we have any follow-  
9 up questions, do you mind if we contact you?

10 MR. ASKEW: Not at all.

11 MR. KRAHOLIK: All right. Thanks for your time  
12 and cooperation.

13 MR. ASKEW: Okay.

14 (Whereupon, the interview in the above-entitled  
15 matter was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

CASE TITLE: SEPTA Fire  
ACCIDENT NO.: RRD25FR006  
LOCATION: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
DATE: September 26, 2025

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the National Transportation Safety Board 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.

Date: October 7, 2025

[Redacted Signature]

Marcia Thurmond  
Official Transcriber  
Reporting Corporation

[Redacted Address] W.

Heritage [Redacted] poration