

# TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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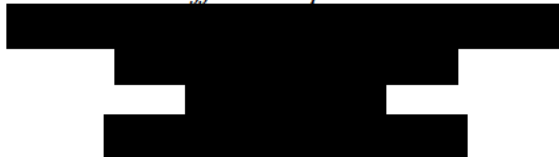
Investigation of: )  
SEPTA Fire ) Accident No.: RRD25FR006  
)

Interview of: BRAD OKONIEWSKI, Assistant General Manager,  
Systems Safety, for SEPTA

Pages: 1 through 67  
Place: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
Date: September 30, 2025

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**HERITAGE REPORTING CORPORATION**  
*Official Reporters*





APPEARANCES:

TODD KRAHOLIK, NTSB Assistant IIC

BRETT JOHNSON, NTSB, Motive Power Group Chair

RICHARD SHERRY, Federal Railroad Administration

I N D E X

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

2                   MR. KRAHOLIK: My name is Todd Kraholik. I'm the  
3 NTSB Assistant IIC for this accident. We're here today  
4 on September 30 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to  
5 conduct an interview with Brad Okoniewski, who works  
6 for SEPTA.

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

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

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

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

19                   I'll start off and then pass it to my right.  
20 Again, my name is Todd Kraholik. The spelling of my  
21 last name is K-R-A-H-O-L-I-K, and I'm the NTSB  
22 Assistant IIC.

23                   MR. JOHNSON: Brett Johnson, J-O-H-N-S-O-N. I'm  
24 with the National Transportation Safety Board, and I  
25 am the Motive Power Group Chair for this

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1 investigation.

2 MR. OKONIEWSKI: Brad Okoniewski,  
3 O-K-O-N-I-E-W-S-K-I, Assistant General Manager,  
4 Systems Safety, for SEPTA.

5 MR. SHERRY: Richard Sherry. Last name's  
6 spelling S-H-E-R-R-Y. FRA IIC on this investigation.

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

8 Brad, do we have your permission to record our  
9 discussion with you today?

10 MR. OKONIEWSKI: Yes.

11 MR. KRAHOLIK: Do you understand the  
12 transcription will be part of a public docket, and as  
13 such, we can't guarantee any confidentiality?

14 MR. OKONIEWSKI: Yes.

15 MR. KRAHOLIK: And as we discussed, you do not  
16 have a representative with you today, is that correct?

17 MR. OKONIEWSKI: Yes.

18 MR. KRAHOLIK: All right, everybody, please  
19 clearly announce your name and title before  
20 questioning.

21 INTERVIEW OF BRAD OKONIEWSKI

22 BY MR. KRAHOLIK:

23 Q All right, Brad, can you give us a synopsis of  
24 your work experience? Take us up to your present job,  
25 and let us know how long you've been in your current

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( [REDACTED]

1 position.

2 A My whole work history?

3 Q Anything relevant to your job now.

4 A Okay. I guess, in being a leader from a safety  
5 organization, I have been in leadership roles since I  
6 would say 2013, where I was at Carpenter Steel and I  
7 was their Global Director of Environmental Health and  
8 Safety for three years in Reading, Pennsylvania,  
9 Global Operations.

10 I then spent one year at Campbell's Soup as their  
11 Global Director of Environmental Health and Safety.

12 And then I spent five years with American Water,  
13 which is the largest water utility in the United  
14 States, as the Vice President of Environmental Health  
15 and Safety and then just Safety.

16 And then spent two years with Summit Materials,  
17 which is a construction material company, aggregates,  
18 concrete, paving, things of that nature, as the Senior  
19 Vice President of Safety and then Environmental and  
20 Safety.

21 And then, in November 18, 2024, I started at  
22 SEPTA as the Chief Safety Officer for SEPTA. And the  
23 title changed in the last month or so when the General  
24 Manager changed all our titles to Assistant General  
25 Managers plus your functional, which mine was Systems

1 Safety.

2 Q So what does a Chief Safety Officer do at SEPTA?

3 Like, what are your duties? What do you do?

4 A So, well, I think there's two things that I'd like  
5 to point out. One is certainly the role itself is to  
6 manage the overall day-to-day safety activities and  
7 also the future strategy and the, you know, safety  
8 culture and safety things going forward. I was  
9 brought in because they have -- they know that SEPTA  
10 has a gap in those areas and they wanted someone to  
11 come in who has a proven track record in addressing  
12 safety performance, safety culture, and things of that  
13 nature.

14 But back to the day-to-day operations, we had an  
15 FTA Safety Management Inspection before I came here, I  
16 think it finished in 2024. There were many, many  
17 action items. We were completing those. The team was  
18 about 30 people and it's growing. As part of the SMI,  
19 one of the action items, we grew to over 70 people,  
20 and so we're hiring in different areas to expand that  
21 team to address many of the gaps that we have from a  
22 safety standpoint, and we are up to about 60-something  
23 people now, 65 or 68 people of the 77 we need to hire  
24 in the group.

25 Q And how does Systems Safety fit in? You don't --

1 none of the departments report to you, right? Track,  
2 Engineering?

3 A Correct.

4 Q So you're kind of separate?

5 A Right. We're, I wouldn't call it exactly  
6 consultants. The way that I've done it in the past,  
7 we're collaborators, we're influencers, right. We  
8 write procedures. We do audits. We provide guidance  
9 and assistance. For compliance, we ensure compliance,  
10 you know, through our, you know, let's say rules, audit  
11 procedures here, things like that. And we also track  
12 performance and provide, you know, recommendations for  
13 improvement and look at safety culture and working  
14 with unions and leadership to provide leadership  
15 because has to be -- it's really owned by the front-  
16 line level because I can do what -- you know, I can't  
17 be everywhere, nor can all the safety people. It's  
18 really the front-line supervisors day to day that  
19 drive whatever culture you have in any group.

20 Q None of -- when you go up your chain, you report  
21 directly to the -- who do you report to?

22 A I report to the General Manager, Scott Sauer.

23 Q Okay. And you don't -- none of the department  
24 heads in any way, shape, form fit under your scheme of  
25 umbrella, right? They report to somebody else that

1 reports, that ends up equal to you, right? None of  
2 the departments fall under you, is that -- I just want  
3 to make sure that's correct.

4 A That is correct.

5 Q Okay.

6 A That is correct.

7 Q So, if -- and I know you've only been here a short  
8 time --

9 A Yeah, yeah.

10 Q -- but, when they hire a new manager for, let's  
11 just go with Mechanical Department, do you teach that  
12 manager anything about safety? Do you go over the  
13 rules with him? What do you when a new manager comes  
14 in?

15 A I don't do anything personally. My group, there  
16 is a New Employee Orientation that they go through  
17 through the Training Group, and then there's some  
18 internal training that is done by the department. I  
19 don't know what that is exactly. We don't do, you  
20 know, Safety Department does not give them specialized  
21 safety training. One of our goals is to set up an  
22 overall training program that allows them to  
23 understand what do we have here, what are the  
24 expectations for leadership basically, what's safety  
25 leadership's expectations in terms of how you do your

1 job, what are the expectations around safety  
2 committees, what are the expectations around  
3 compliance, right, you know, all those things, and  
4 then say this is why we audit and check, but we're also  
5 here to help you, so -- but that is not in place yet  
6 by any means. That is one of our future goals, one of  
7 the reasons why I'm here.

8 Q Okay. And what about when you have a new hire  
9 employee? Do you go over anything, the union folk, do  
10 you go over anything with a new hire? Or is their  
11 training still with each department that they're  
12 hired?

13 A It's with each department. I believe the -- and  
14 this, I know this is recorded, I don't need to call  
15 anybody, but I think the location safety committees do  
16 some work with them, but I don't know what that is.

17 Q Got you. Okay.

18 A But, you know, full transparency, it's not like a  
19 week training course. You know, it may be a walk-  
20 around or an hour discussion or something like that if  
21 there's anything. But there is, right now, we are  
22 setting up with the Training Department, they want to  
23 do a tour of Systems Safety, which is where they come  
24 around and they talk to different people in our  
25 departments and we describe a little more in depth,

1 versus the new employee orientation, which is a super  
2 high-level overview, so more in-depth, but that is  
3 still not developed yet.

4 Q Okay. And then, and I know I'm asking the same  
5 question a few different ways.

6 A Yeah, fine.

7 Q But I want to make sure I get it right.

8 A Yeah. Mm-hmm.

9 Q The yearly training, you guys aren't in charge of  
10 that either. That's with the departments as well,  
11 right?

12 A There is some yearly training that our  
13 departments do, like the 30-hour OSHA classes, our  
14 department will do. Some of the other training. I  
15 could get you a list of what training they do, like,  
16 if there is specific training on certain topics. I  
17 can't think of one off the top of my head right now  
18 that my team will do, but we do some of the trainings  
19 for operations, but we do not do all the training.

20 The Training Department does some of the  
21 training, a lot of the training.

22 Q Right. Okay.

23 A We have some people in training, like we have  
24 some people that have the title of Training in our  
25 department, but they're content developers, not

1 deliverers.

2 Q I got you. So what they deliver to new hires,  
3 you guys have implement -- or are a part of what they  
4 give to them, but you don't actually give it to them?

5 A Correct.

6 Q Okay. Got you. I'm with you now. So, when you  
7 go around and do -- well, let me back up. Do you have  
8 regular meetings with each of the crafts, I'm going to  
9 call them Mechanical, Track, do you have regular  
10 meetings with any of those folks?

11 A Well, what I have regular meetings with is they  
12 have a Safety Strategy Committee which is only with  
13 TW-234, which is like rail, trans -- mostly bus  
14 operators and some other things. But I think they're  
15 the largest union. And we talk about strategy. It  
16 was a committee that was formed before that I want to  
17 say kind of went dormant, and then I've revitalized it  
18 and we're working through that as a committee on what  
19 we're -- there's a difference between understanding  
20 strategy and solving problems, right. So we're trying  
21 to get past the solving problems to look at strategy  
22 because this is the head of the union leadership with  
23 myself; the head of the Training Group, Jessica  
24 Herman; Operations, Frank Brandis; and Kate, head of  
25 the EMMC. So we're four on this to look at strategy.

1 So we're working through that process.

2 We have not done any actual strategy yet, but one  
3 of the things that I brought along that we talk about  
4 is we try to get some simple things. Stop work  
5 authority. They have, you know, the good faith  
6 challenge, but this is more than a good faith  
7 challenge, it's anyone can do it. A good faith  
8 challenge is very -- you know, it's only part of what  
9 we do, right? Not everyone really has that. So what  
10 is it more broadly, to allow that to be more of a  
11 commonplace activity to say stop, I want to talk about  
12 this, let's pause, right? To go for it to have a  
13 chance, if it has more documentation and everything,  
14 this is more of a conversational piece to really just  
15 get it so it becomes part of what we do, okay?

16 Q I got you.

17 A And I can show you, this is one of the -- this is  
18 a prototype that we've been using. So, you know, zero  
19 harm in doing this. So we've got that.

20 And so then there's two Joint Health Safety  
21 Committees, and then there's 30-something Location  
22 Safety Committees. So these Location Safety  
23 Committees, LSCs, report up to either one of these two  
24 joint ones. There's one for railroad and there's one  
25 for bus/rail transit, okay?

1           So I meet, you know, monthly, and I don't make  
2 every monthly meeting, but for each of the two JHSCs.  
3 They're not, right now, they're not much more than  
4 solving problems. If it doesn't get resolved at the  
5 JSC, we've got water on the floor, no one's done  
6 anything about it for 90 days, it kicks up to the  
7 other group and we talk about it in that group and we  
8 try and fix it.

9           I'm trying to evolve it to be more proactive of an  
10 activity because great, we can fix these problems. I  
11 don't need to have a meeting with 30 people to say we  
12 need to fix water on the floor, right? We can fix  
13 that outside of a meeting. I need people who can talk  
14 about this and change our culture. You know, that's  
15 what we need to do. I mean, these people in this room  
16 who come in these meetings go out there and influence  
17 people to change our culture, right? So I work with  
18 those groups.

19           And then we have the Location Safety Committees,  
20 which is truly I've got a problem. You know, I've got  
21 rats in my cashier's booth. We need to take care of  
22 this, you know. Or, you know, there's a safety issue  
23 with, you know, with, I don't know, whatever, right,  
24 that's not getting resolved with my supervisor. And so  
25 we take care of it there, you know, in these

1 locations. And I think there's like 30, 28 of the  
2 bus/rail transit ones, and there's maybe four or five  
3 railroad ones that are there. And I've made a couple  
4 bus ones. I've not been to any railroad ones yet.

5 Q I got you. So, when you go out and do your  
6 audits, do you take -- let's say you do a mechanical  
7 audit on a mechanical employee. Do you take a  
8 mechanical manager with you or do you do it separate?

9 A I know in the past that they have not always gone  
10 and they've done audits individually. My process that  
11 I've told my people to do since I've been here is,  
12 whenever you go do an audit, you can be a surprise  
13 audit, but you need to grab somebody or at least tell  
14 them what you're doing.

15 Often, the most common audits that my team does  
16 for compliance checks is, like, say speeding, where  
17 the bus is speeding or driving in the parking lot,  
18 things like that, and they just turn in and say, well,  
19 you know, Richard's here, he sped, he went 10 miles  
20 over. I'm like, that's not helpful for anything. What  
21 are we doing with this? How are we helping? You need  
22 to walk with the manager and talk about how do we fix  
23 this problem because handing him a sheet of paper with  
24 10 people out of 20 that's bad doesn't fix the problem,  
25 you know, and we need to have -- we need to

1 collaborate. We need to assist them and help them  
2 solve it. They may say, I don't know what to do.  
3 Let's talk about it.

4 So there's not a written procedure that they're  
5 supposed to do. In the past, that's what they did, was  
6 go do an audit, send an email. And I've encouraged my  
7 team and told them that this is how I want you to do  
8 your audits and your compliance checks, is take  
9 someone with you, make sure that -- first of all,  
10 they've got to at least know you're out there. If they  
11 can't make it, okay, they can't make it because you  
12 surprised them and they're working. But I'd like you  
13 to be able to walk, if you're walking through a shop,  
14 I want you to walk through the shop with the  
15 individual. If you can't take a manager, take someone  
16 from the safety committee so you can teach them as  
17 well.

18 So this is how we change the thing. They become  
19 force multipliers. If we just go do our job and hand  
20 them a piece of paper, it does nothing in my opinion.  
21 It does absolutely nothing because they may fix it,  
22 but it doesn't change the process. You know, it  
23 doesn't change the process at all. We have to change  
24 the process. I know you guys are into this. We have  
25 to change the process.

1 Q Right. So, when you do an audit and hand it to  
2 the department, it seems that you have -- have you  
3 done any rail audits since you've been here?

4 A They don't do as many as they do on the rail  
5 trans. I've not done any. They do some rail audits,  
6 you know, but they do the same process. We'll turn  
7 them in.

8 Q How many do you think, rail audits, you've done  
9 since you've been here?

10 A I can find out.

11 Q Ten or more? Or you think --

12 A Probably 10 or more, but, you know, they have a  
13 plan for each year to do them, you know.

14 Q I got you.

15 A But I don't track them. That's one of the things  
16 they do as -- I get some summaries of different, of,  
17 you know, what's the most non-compliant. Again, that's  
18 some of the things that we talk about in our monthly  
19 reports. Okay, we found that this violation is the  
20 most one that's occurring of the top three. What are  
21 we doing about it, folks? What are we doing about it?  
22 Just sharing that information with Operations is not  
23 enough to change the culture because they go, okay,  
24 what do I do about it? We need to help them figure it  
25 out because otherwise it doesn't change. They go, oh,

1 thanks, put this over in the corner. What do we do  
2 about it?

3 And, you know, I always live by the 80/20 rule.  
4 You do audits, you get enough data, you know, you get  
5 the top three things. You probably can knock out 50  
6 percent of your overall problems by knocking out the  
7 top three when you haven't done anything, you know.

8 Q Right.

9 A I mean, we did this in the aggregates. I don't  
10 know if you guys are familiar with MSHA, but, you  
11 know, they have to do a daily evaluation at MSHA, a  
12 work-site evaluation. Check sheet everything. Three  
13 things always came up. Electrical -- and you always  
14 get violations. You're written finds electrical, fire  
15 extinguishers, and I'm drawing a blank on the third one  
16 all of a sudden, whatever it is. But it was like 90  
17 percent of everything was those three things.

18 I said, folks, what are we doing about this? If  
19 we just focus on these three things, we can eliminate  
20 most of our violations in this company. And we did.  
21 We knocked off a big chunk because they did focus on  
22 those daily examinations, because you are required to  
23 do them, so why not get ahead of them and fix them?  
24 So I'm going probably on the same principle here.  
25 We're not there yet.

1 Q Got you. So, when you go do an audit, if you  
2 find -- I guess an audit would be another way to say  
3 as, like, a rules check type of thing.

4 A Yeah, a rules check, a compliance check, an audit  
5 essentially.

6 Q So, when you find that stuff, do you assess  
7 discipline?

8 A We don't assess discipline. We turn it over to,  
9 you know, the manager and they may assess discipline  
10 with that. What I've told my folks, and this is  
11 something that I'm actually having a meeting on next  
12 week, there's some discussion with my folks. They feel  
13 that they should participate further. I said wait a  
14 second, because they feel like we don't want to be the  
15 cops, the safety cops. I said, but hold on. If you  
16 see someone going 50 miles an hour over the speed  
17 limit, you're like a cop writing a ticket. You have to  
18 show up at court. Otherwise, the manager can't -- he's  
19 going to lose the grievance process, right, because  
20 the person who saw you wasn't there, so you have to  
21 participate in that.

22 If it's a coaching thing where you're five miles  
23 over, that's different. Then that's a coaching event.  
24 You know, that's not what we're talking about. But we  
25 have to be part of that process when we need to be.

1 But we're not necessarily part of that process.

2 Q I got you. Do you feel that you're getting buy-in  
3 from each department, or are you guys looked at more  
4 of a nuisance than a help?

5 A I'm hesitating because I think it's a mix. I  
6 think, you know, there's a lot of history here I'm  
7 finding out. And there's also a lot of personality  
8 issues because folks have worked here a long time and  
9 I think there's some issues with how people have  
10 interacted, you know, with our department and with  
11 others and just how they feel about Systems Safety.  
12 And I've worked really hard to change that, and I've  
13 instructed my leadership, my deputy chiefs -- that's  
14 why I also brought in two new ones from outside the  
15 group. Emily Yates, you might have heard her name;  
16 Sarah Powell, she was our Safety Culture person. We  
17 brought her into the group. She's a culture person  
18 really focused on Systems Safety or safety. She was  
19 hired a few months before me, and I said, well, why  
20 isn't she in my group, right? So I brought her over  
21 as well, and she has emergency response background.

22 So, you know, kind of a round-about way to answer  
23 the question. I think it depends on who -- their  
24 experiences with some of the leadership that was  
25 there. I think Systems Safety, you know, I wouldn't

1 say it was ignored, but, you know, it was probably not  
2 the driving factor on some of the things, how managers  
3 operated some of their departments, which is not  
4 atypical when you have issues, you know, and that's  
5 where we have to change. That's why personally we've  
6 got to say you need to go talk to people and you need  
7 to work through things about why this is important to  
8 me, what do I need to do, and, you know, why is this  
9 going to make me better. If you can't make someone  
10 understand those things, they'll never do it for you as  
11 a manager. They'll say it's a waste of time. I'll do  
12 it to check the box and get you off my back. But, if  
13 it's not important to them or it's not going to give  
14 them value, they're not going to do it again.

15 And so we have to do things differently here in  
16 Systems Safety, not that we're doing things wrong or  
17 bad, but we weren't doing things right to change the  
18 culture if that makes sense.

19 Q Got you.

20 A You can't do those certain things. You know, just  
21 having audits is not going to change the culture, you  
22 know.

23 Q Right, right.

24 A And hand it to them.

25 Q So, like, we heard in some interviews that the

1 train crews may just unscrew a light bulb, right? Or,  
2 with new bulletin out, you know, they may not call in  
3 the MP-11s that they're doing. Do you guys get  
4 involved with that, or is that the departments that  
5 get involved with that?

6 A My group, what I told my group when I heard this,  
7 I mean, I heard this. I did it by unscrewing a light  
8 bulb. That's just devious, all I can say is that,  
9 right, when you get to that point, right? You're doing  
10 that on purpose. I mean, it's one thing to ignore  
11 something. It's another thing -- and I've seen it in  
12 other places where people do it. It's usually because,  
13 hey, look, I don't want to deal with this. It's a  
14 nuisance to me, but I want to keep doing what I'm doing  
15 and this is a road block for me, you know.

16 But how do we get there? And just like we talked  
17 about when we were watching the video, I always ask  
18 the question, how did so many crews do that? I think  
19 we got the answer to that, right? It's the culture of  
20 what we have here, is that the culture's like, either  
21 whether it's some of the things that I heard out of  
22 the interviews from the other guys was, you know, they  
23 said, like, things don't get fixed or, you know, it's a  
24 nuisance to what I'm doing during the day.

25 That's -- we've got to change that mind set. I

1 mean, nothing will change if we don't change that mind  
2 set. And I've had that before, where people are like,  
3 oh, you know, we're just going to wait you out and  
4 we'll go back to what we do. There's no waiting out  
5 here. We have fires. We have, you know, I'm on tape  
6 now, how can I say that, but we have serious stuff  
7 going on, folks. This is not messing around. This  
8 isn't a nuisance alarm. This is important, you know.

9 And Scott, you know, has got plans and, you know,  
10 we're talking about doing things. We're certainly  
11 going to talk with the FRA this week about some of the  
12 other things that are going to be going down, you  
13 know, and things that we're going to do, take some  
14 drastic action at that point. When you hear this,  
15 that's the only option you have. You know, it's a  
16 management issue. It's not a front-line issue, it's a  
17 management issue.

18 Q Right. So is there a way for you to track the  
19 discipline -- is there a way -- if the department  
20 writes up a failure for whatever --

21 A Mm-hmm.

22 Q -- is there a way that you get tracking on it, or  
23 does it not come to you?

24 A I have no insight into discipline whatsoever.

25 Q Okay. Okay.

1 A Unless I'm directly involved with it, and even  
2 then, because of processes, I may lose sight of it, so  
3 to speak, if it moves on from me.

4 If I can just use an example, like, you know, if  
5 I see something on you and then you get disciplined  
6 and I have to report on it, that's all I see. If you  
7 decide that you want to appeal it, I'm out of the  
8 picture. It's on to the next person who's reviewing it  
9 and doing that, and I don't think I hear about it  
10 again. I mean, I may hear about it personally because  
11 of my role, but I don't hear about every case or any  
12 case actually that I'm not involved with.

13 Q I got you. So, when that -- when the new  
14 bulletin went out about calling in MP-11s or the  
15 lights --

16 A Yeah.

17 Q -- who came up with that? Was that Systems  
18 Safety, you guys? Or was that the departments that  
19 came up with that?

20 A Well, the bulletin order is a process that the  
21 railroad uses. So I know that we talked as a team,  
22 and this was the -- you know, we talked about this how  
23 do we communicate when you say we need a new policy,  
24 and they said, well, the bulletin order is the way to  
25 do it. And on I think it was the 25th of or 24th of

1 July, after that, after the 722 incident, Scott and I  
2 and Frank got together and said we need to pull  
3 everyone in Mechanical and Operations Railroad  
4 together and we need, you know, a good come to Jesus,  
5 what are we going to do? This has got to stop. What  
6 are our goals? No smoking, no fires, no injuries.  
7 That's our goal.

8 One of the first things was, what can we do  
9 quickly? Put a new policy in place to stop. You  
10 know, when you get a light or the DBOL light, we're  
11 stopping trains, right? You know, do we get one  
12 reset? We went through a whole process, right. They  
13 came up with it. But that's an Operations piece of it.  
14 That's their procedure and their policy.

15 Q So you came up with -- you worked with them to  
16 come up with we should probably put a bulletin out,  
17 but as far as implementing the bulletin or any of  
18 that, that wasn't you, that was Transportation or  
19 Mechanical?

20 A Right.

21 Q Okay. Okay. I got you. Can you describe your  
22 risk management process in general terms?

23 A Okay. That's pretty broad. Let me think about  
24 that for a little bit. Okay. So, in general, when  
25 there are incidents, you know, we do a risk ranking.

1 We have a process within Systems Safety under the SMS  
2 principles to risk rank it and score it. And if it's a  
3 high score, then, you know, you do certain actions.  
4 If it's a low score, it may be something that's not.

5 It is fairly new to SEPTA, so we have, full  
6 transparency, we've had gaps at times where we don't do  
7 everything right off the bat and say, oh, we should  
8 probably do a risk assessment on that and do that.

9 We do have, one of our new departments in Systems  
10 Safety under the SMI is to have risk management and  
11 risk assurance. So we're having directors for both of  
12 those, which we're going through a hiring process right  
13 now, and specialists under those.

14 When I got here and I started to understand what  
15 we were doing in this process, in full transparency,  
16 we were hiring the lowest levels first, the safety  
17 officers. And I said that's not really a good way to  
18 do it. We need to look at the higher-level folks  
19 first so they can help us pick the right people. We  
20 need to hire the experts who are going to run our  
21 departments who can then pick the right people, you  
22 know.

23 So we reversed that trend. We went through a  
24 little bit with the FTA because wait a second, you  
25 signed up for that. I said, like, I reserved the

1 right to get smarter, okay? You know, I wasn't here,  
2 but I'm going to do something smarter, do it this way.  
3 And so, you know, we're going through that process.  
4 Sarah is leading up that piece of it because Sarah  
5 knows risk management. That's part of her background.  
6 And so we're moving ahead and we're going to finish,  
7 we're going to have those hired in the next few months.

8 Q I got you. So is there -- so there kind of is  
9 like a risk log or database type thing? It sounds  
10 like you have some kind of database for it or  
11 something?

12 A Well, we also do with the com, with our caps, and  
13 our -- I forgot, DIH, it's something the state uses,  
14 but it's to do a risk analysis. So they see something,  
15 is this a hazard? You know, then we go about it and  
16 do a risk assessment on it. And the same thing. If  
17 it comes up high up enough, we do something. If it's  
18 low enough, we say, no, you know, it's not anything  
19 like, you know, one light bulb went out on 12. We do  
20 a risk assessment of it. They actually asked us to do  
21 that. We did a risk assessment. No, it didn't turn  
22 out to be anything that we have to really worry about.  
23 The normal maintenance will catch that, right?

24 So I don't know if we have a risk assessment log.  
25 There may be, you know, a database in SharePoint where

1 we have some of these, but it's not like -- to my  
2 knowledge, and I can find out for you, I don't know of  
3 one that we have, like, on SharePoint that we list  
4 every single one we've ever gotten. They're probably  
5 buried in reports, you know, individual incident  
6 reports and things like that.

7 Q I got you. So what are the key elements of a  
8 strong and positive safety culture?

9 A Okay. So I think there's a couple things here.  
10 So, first of all, you have to have -- well, there's  
11 four, I call them personally four elements.

12 First of all, there's got to be leadership. You  
13 have to have good leadership. You have to have good  
14 processes and systems, and that could be anything from  
15 your procedures, your policies, your risk assessment  
16 method, you know, all those key components that go  
17 part of it. And then you have to have engagement from  
18 the front line. This is supervision and as in hourly  
19 employees. If you don't have that -- to me, that's  
20 like the middle.

21 And the third part really is also your, you know,  
22 your safety assurance or really your audits and all  
23 that stuff. So, you know, plan, do, check, act. How  
24 do you make sure you've got the right leadership, the  
25 right policies and procedures, you know, and then how

1 do you make sure that you're checking on those, right?  
2 Plan, do, check, act, right, you know.

3 And then what makes it run, I call it the heart  
4 of the triangle, is engagement, employee engagement.  
5 And you have to have people engaged in safety at the  
6 front-line level. I can go out every day and spend  
7 all my time in the field, and it's not going to make  
8 much of a difference, but it's the people who will  
9 lead it in the field.

10 One thing that we're doing that I don't know if  
11 you guys have heard about, it's a long-term project,  
12 but it's going to be a game-changer at the end of the  
13 day when we do it right, to report hazards and report  
14 observations by the front line, they use something  
15 called a cognito form, which is basically just a form  
16 you turn in. It goes off into the wind, Safety gets  
17 it, they do something with the manager, it gets fixed  
18 or gets addressed, but they don't always give feedback  
19 to the employee. That's really important, right?

20 So, before I came here, of all companies,  
21 Salesforce, I never heard of Salesforce having this  
22 platform, but it's basically an Employee Safety  
23 Reporting System. We have rolled it out now to our  
24 SAM employees, you know, our management employees for  
25 observations and use it for audits. It's going to be

1 one source of truth for safety. We're going to add it  
2 to incidents.

3 So this is what's really important to this, is if  
4 you wanted to put an observation in or you saw a  
5 hazard, you could go check on the status of that  
6 incident and you'll get a notification that it's  
7 closed. I mean, you can check your email, you can go  
8 check it on your phone when you're on a break or  
9 something, right. You can say, okay, what's the status  
10 of my case? Because all your cases will be there  
11 personalized for you.

12 But what's really powerful is this, for me in  
13 Systems Safety, now I can monitor and manage for  
14 everybody what's going on. So what I can do with this,  
15 it's like, okay, we have an incident, like this  
16 incident we're talking about, right? All right, we're  
17 going to come up with caps. Now I can -- now, rather  
18 than have a spreadsheet and trying to track them off a  
19 spreadsheet, I've got it in the computer system that  
20 assigns it to each of you three guys. And then, if I  
21 do it at the end of the month, it shows up. Brett,  
22 you get a reminder that says it's due. And then I  
23 produce reports.

24 Now I go to the GM meeting and I say here's our  
25 status of where we are and were's where we're at on the

1 number one things, the hazards that we have and these  
2 are the number two hazards, right? So now I have a  
3 way to give feedback to my management team as well as  
4 the Location Safety Committees. We can do it on  
5 people as supervisors so we know how good they're being  
6 in terms of what they need to do. So we can do it on  
7 people, locations, you know, overall on the business  
8 and how we're doing. It uses a metric of how are we  
9 getting things done? How are we getting things  
10 reported?

11 One of the things that we always did in most of  
12 the places I worked at is also check what's incoming.  
13 And if we were getting very little miss reports, I  
14 would get squeamish because that means people weren't  
15 engaged. I loved it when we were getting a lot of  
16 near miss reports because that means people are  
17 engaged and we can do something about it. And that's  
18 what we can hear. We don't get a lot of near miss  
19 reports here. We get very few. Like 10 a year. I  
20 mean, like, it should be like a thousand.

21 I mean, when I was at American Water, the water  
22 company, we got up to, like, a thousand a month. And  
23 our goal was to get 99 percent of them in 30 days.  
24 Now we started at 90, but we got so good that we kept  
25 upping the bar on ourselves, and it was an actual

1 bonus metric for the company because we've got to keep  
2 moving the goalpost. You've got to get them done.  
3 It's important, right, and people took action.

4 That's where I want to get us here, where we're  
5 taking action and driving it. Each of these cases are  
6 assigned to a Systems Safety person to follow up on.  
7 Now we're in infancy stages. We just rolled it out,  
8 we're getting people to put it in. These are just SAM  
9 employees. And we have to cross some IT issues  
10 because it's run on personal phones and other stuff.  
11 But that's going to come into next year. But, even if  
12 we can get it just for the management piece, we can  
13 put some things in.

14 You know, I've asked already, do we have it in the  
15 system for the 50 items, is it 40 items that we  
16 submitted to both your groups around the thermal event  
17 actions. They're in the system right now and assigned  
18 to, like, Greg Busby, Jeff Thomas, Thompson, excuse  
19 me. I knew a Jeff Thomas. Different people. And  
20 then we track them. So they're going to know how it  
21 is. So we're getting used to it. We're flexing our  
22 muscles with this, building muscle memory.

23 So that's all part of good safety culture too is  
24 when we can manage what we need to do because it's so  
25 easy to say here's what went wrong, write up some

1 corrective action and then, you know, put it away.  
2 You can't put it away if we're going to track it and  
3 we're going to monitor it and we're going to remind  
4 people about it. And that's our job to do. We're the  
5 conscience of the organization at that point.

6 Q I got you. My last question. The Short Line  
7 Safety Institute gave you a safety cultures assessment  
8 in April of 2025. Have you guys implemented anything  
9 that they said in there? Is there anything that you  
10 guys have done from this assessment?

11 A Not Systems Safety directly. I mean, what Rich  
12 Mahon did was do some things with his union and his  
13 committees in terms of that. Most of it was around  
14 culture and management culture, and I'll say what we  
15 did do is we shared it with our culture team, which is  
16 not just Sarah but HR. Emanuela, what was her -- she  
17 was Chief DEI Officer and now she's also now -- AG, I'm  
18 sorry, but now she's also Acting HR AGM. So part of  
19 the culture with it, so that's all part of what we need  
20 to wrap in with it. With Rich Mahon retiring, you  
21 know, it's something that we are grabbing into, how are  
22 we going to do this as an organization. So we haven't  
23 done, like, a whole strategy and plan to that, but  
24 that's something we were looking at doing going into  
25 fourth quarter, you know, to build it into 2026. So

1 we've done some little things with Rich, but we have  
2 not done anything directly overall because that's also  
3 a part of it. We in Systems Safety have to look at  
4 the whole organization as well.

5 MR. KRAHOLIK: I got you. I'm going to pass it  
6 to Brett.

7 MR. JOHNSON: All right. Brett Johnson, NTSB.  
8 How are you doing, Brad? Do you need to take a break  
9 or anything?

10 MR. OKONIEWSKI: No, unless you have water.

11 MR. JOHNSON: There's a water jug over there.

12 MR. OKONIEWSKI: Okay.

13 MR. JOHNSON: We'll just -- we'll take a break  
14 here for a second.

15 (Pause.)

16 BY MR. JOHNSON:

17 Q So you have right now between 65 to 68 employees  
18 that work for you directly, is that correct?

19 A Correct.

20 Q And you're structured to support 77 employees  
21 within the safety chain of command that you have,  
22 right?

23 A Correct.

24 Q So just can you give me a summary of what that  
25 structure looks like of those employees, starting with

1 you down to the ballast line?

2 A Sure. Okay. So it's me at the top of the  
3 organization chart with four deputy chiefs. So one,  
4 there's one, Dave Hunter, who is now -- who is our  
5 Operational and Accident Prevention Deputy Chief, so  
6 he's got a dozen investigator officers and then he's  
7 got I think four or six operational safety. So the  
8 operational safety will do, like, the compliance  
9 checks and they'll do some operational support as part  
10 of what they do.

11 And then we have a Deputy Chief Koran, who is the  
12 one who's doing the safety certification work, which  
13 is new to us as well, it's not something we had before,  
14 and construction safety.

15 Q Okay.

16 A And so they're hiring a few people there. And we  
17 have about eight people in the construction safety  
18 group.

19 And then we have Emily Yates, who is the Deputy  
20 Chief of Occupational Safety, Environmental Management  
21 and Sustainability. So she has Sustainability. She  
22 has the environmental officers and the occupational  
23 safety officers, so more like the OSHA side of the  
24 fence for, like, inside the, you know, shops and  
25 others that are covered by OSHA and those regulations.

1 Q Okay.

2 A And then we have -- I know OSHA has all the data.  
3 I have three data management people and then three  
4 training people, and two they're called safety  
5 promotion, so communications people as well.

6 Q Mm-hmm.

7 A And then there's Sarah Powell, who is in charge of  
8 Safety, Culture, and Risk Management. She's one with  
9 basically no one on her team right now, is just hiring  
10 folks. She has some safety assurance people, but they  
11 aren't here. Hiring emergency management director with  
12 a couple direct reports under that. And then also the  
13 risk management specialists, who will then -- a  
14 director, who will then have I think three direct  
15 reports off of that one. And that's basically the  
16 organization.

17 Q Okay. So you have your organization here and  
18 let's just say from Operations, for Operational Safety,  
19 of those employees that are in that sub-department,  
20 how many came to the agency into those positions from  
21 being a craft employee or boots on the ground doing  
22 work for SEPTA in some craft or something? Ball park.

23 A Yeah. Seventy-five to 90 percent.

24 Q Okay. All right. And --

25 A The other ones, I'm sorry, the other ones will

1 probably be police officers that we hired.

2 Q Okay.

3 A I don't know anyone else who came off the street  
4 as like a, you know, safety environmental at a  
5 chemical plant. No one like that.

6 Q Got you.

7 A They're either in-house or probably police  
8 officers.

9 Q Okay. And so how do those folks drive the safety  
10 culture?

11 A I think they drive some of the safety culture a  
12 little bit one-on-one by, you know, how they work  
13 with -- this is why I said, you know, they think  
14 they're driving the safety culture by performing audits  
15 and handing a piece of paper.

16 Q Mm-hmm.

17 A They're not necessarily teaching and engaging.  
18 Some of those operational safety folks do more of  
19 that. They are assigned to sit on the Location Safety  
20 Committees. Each of them -- everyone has an  
21 assignment to be on a safety committee. So there,  
22 they do, you know, as part of that and they're  
23 influencing that level. That's why I don't attend  
24 those for one thing, is that we have folks at that  
25 level to do it.

1 Q Mm-hmm.

2 A So it's more what they do in the field, whether  
3 it's investigation or the operation, basically helping  
4 solve problems, trying to do it.

5 Q Got you. All right. And you made the statement  
6 a couple times that supervisors drive safety culture,  
7 right? And you're talking about the supervision of,  
8 like, outside of the Safety Department, like your  
9 mechanical, your track, is that correct?

10 A Mm-hmm.

11 Q So how do you influence them, those supervisors,  
12 those front-line managers and assistant directors and  
13 directors, to drive safety?

14 A Sure. Well, we're not doing much yet because this  
15 is all, you know, I just got here. I have to do an  
16 assessment to understand where we are and what we need  
17 to do because I could go right to the front line, but  
18 if you don't have buy-in up the line, it doesn't happen  
19 either. I mean, you're wasting your time as much as  
20 anything.

21 So, until -- you know, Frank Brandis has come in  
22 and he gets it, you know, and so we're now looking at  
23 where other people at director levels are. Do we have  
24 the right people in these places to lead the safety  
25 culture, you know?

1           And the other part of it too that we're doing, and  
2 this is organization-wide, is there is a Leadership  
3 Academy basically that's being developed. Actually, it  
4 already started. There's cohorts and they're doing it  
5 at different levels in the organization so we can  
6 train people how to be a leader, you know, and that  
7 builds your culture because safety culture and culture  
8 is all one thing. It's all different facets of it.  
9 And so it's a Leadership Academy, because as places  
10 that I've worked and probably where you all have worked  
11 too, is people get promoted because they're great at  
12 their job. But they don't get any management training  
13 and they don't know how to be a leader, you know, other  
14 than fix the widgets or whatever. So this is what  
15 this is designed to do.

16           We rented out the Wanamaker Center next door and  
17 they're building this whole program. It started I  
18 think in August and, you know, having people -- one of  
19 my folks has already rolled it in about how to become  
20 a leader.

21       Q     Okay. So, as far as the assessment, you  
22 mentioned obviously being new and trying to change  
23 this culture, how do you assess, how are you making  
24 this assessment? Like, how are you quantifying where  
25 we're at with these leaders?

1 A Sure. Okay. I think, well, a lot of it is  
2 spending time in the field, you know, and walking and  
3 talking and observing, right? So, when you talk to  
4 leaders, whether they're front-line leaders, directors,  
5 you know, how often are they getting out in the field?  
6 You know, what do I see when I get out there? Are  
7 they representing us, what they need to do well? I  
8 can always tell someone, you know, when someone goes  
9 out as a leader and doesn't have the right PPE and are  
10 not wearing it correctly, if they can't do that right,  
11 I can guarantee you they're not doing other things  
12 right when it comes to safety. Just the way it works.

13 Q Okay.

14 A But that's assessing that level. Then at each  
15 level is assessing where we are with this. And we've  
16 talked about it as leadership teams, and what do we  
17 need you to go do differently? That's why the  
18 Leadership Team Academy is coming out, why we're  
19 working with different, with the JSCs and the  
20 committees that we have and trying to look at it from  
21 a whole strategic standpoint, what does this need to  
22 look at and fix our holes.

23 Q Okay. So, as far as, you know, you mentioned  
24 being out and with the leaders, the front-line  
25 operational leaders, how do you document and build

1 that, gather that data to then start making those  
2 decisions? Like, you had mentioned about working with  
3 Frank on, you know, figuring out who's where. How do  
4 you do that?

5 A Well, sometimes I'll document, you know, maybe a  
6 visit or something like that, and that's more in my  
7 past lives where I'd go, you know, I'd travel to a  
8 location and say this is what I saw and what we did  
9 here. It's more conversations with Frank and Scott and  
10 that and what do we need to do, you know, based on  
11 what we're learning through this and how we do things  
12 differently.

13 So, right now, we have spent most of our time  
14 trying to understand it. Frank's new in his role too.  
15 I mean, he's been around here for 37 years or something  
16 like that, but it's been in the bus side of everything.

17 Q Right.

18 A So we're all gathering our data and talking about  
19 how we need to do things differently and understanding  
20 how the operation is actually run because there are  
21 things here that you're finding out that I think are a  
22 surprise other people didn't know this in the  
23 organization.

24 Q Okay, yeah. So we have -- if I'm a front-line  
25 manager, let's say I'm a mechanical shift supervisor or

1 a trainmaster, station manager, whatever you call  
2 them, what safety metrics should I know about my  
3 agency that I work for in my department? What's  
4 something that you expect them to know?

5 A Sure. I think certainly what's applicable to  
6 them. I can tell you that on the injury side it's not  
7 something that this organization has put a lot of  
8 emphasis on.

9 Q Okay.

10 A We need to do a better job with that. Part of it  
11 is because we have very bad data and that's one of the  
12 things with this system, is I can't even tell people  
13 other than numbers because we have bad data. You  
14 know, it's -- I can't even sort it in a way that can be  
15 done very well, but I'll just park that to the side.

16 Say they're maintenance one year, I'll give you an  
17 example, and they're in charge of the trains in the  
18 yards. I started some target, what I call target  
19 teams, okay? We were having high according to our  
20 metrics derailments, right?

21 Q Okay.

22 A So I did some simple analysis, all right? You  
23 know, Colonel Mustard did it with his candlestick in  
24 the library kind of. Okay, we've got 25 derailments  
25 over the last two years. Where did they occur? Half

1 of them were in the yards. Okay, what were the top  
2 yards? Roberts was the top yard. It had, like,  
3 seven, okay? And so we're like, okay, well, let's go  
4 there and let's start taking a look.

5 We started with a team, we had people from  
6 operations, people from management on the team, you  
7 know, and we would invite the supervisor to come. We  
8 walked these yards here because there were three or  
9 four instances that happened right here that we talked  
10 about right out here. Okay. We looked at everything.  
11 We came up with action items to go ahead and fix those  
12 because, again, that 80/20 rule.

13 How do we do this? And it's teaching them to do  
14 this and, okay, folks, I can do this, but you guys  
15 need to do this with your issues. So that's a metric.  
16 Derailments is a metric for Railroad Ops and also Rail  
17 Transit, but, you know, like the trolleys and things  
18 like that.

19 Q So, right now, this morning, what is SEPTA's FRA  
20 reportable FI? Frequency Index.

21 A I don't know that.

22 Q Okay. What about the train accident FI?

23 A I don't know those numbers.

24 Q Okay. So, as far as safety metrics, you say we've  
25 got bad data. What leads you to think that you have

1 bad safety data?

2 A Because we get, either from worker's comp or from  
3 our stuff on the railroad side field reporting, it's  
4 incomplete. We don't have root causes identified in  
5 there. We don't necessarily have good body parts, so  
6 maybe, you know, when we look at, try to look at what  
7 body parts injuries, we may have 10 fingers, 10 toes.  
8 That's not really helpful when you're trying to sort  
9 everything.

10 Q Sure.

11 A So I'm saying we have bad data. Data that -- I  
12 say bad data, so maybe let me qualify it. Data that  
13 is not really usable for analysis very easily, you  
14 know.

15 Q Okay. So, as far as if there's an injury, let's  
16 say. Let's say somebody rolls their ankle, you know,  
17 walking ballasts. What's the expectation of reporting  
18 that injury? What's the expectation on that employee?  
19 You know, what are they supposed to do?

20 A They're supposed to immediately report that as an  
21 injury to their supervisor.

22 Q Okay. Where does it go from there?

23 A It gets reported to the control center.

24 Q Okay.

25 A You know, we get a report on it. There may or

1 may not be a full investigation depending on whether  
2 it's be Systems Safety because we don't have the  
3 resources to investigate every something to that  
4 level.

5 Q Yeah.

6 A And then, basically, you know, that's one of the  
7 things, is we need to improve on that. That's one of  
8 the things, how do we do this? I am trying to sort  
9 what we call serious injuries, right, broken bones.

10 Q Sure. Yeah.

11 A Let's start there.

12 Q Okay. So, as far as paperwork and documentation,  
13 what's the expectation for that?

14 A Well, these will be reported in through a  
15 supervisor and then it goes to worker's comp or the  
16 FELA process that we have to do that part of it.

17 MR. JOHNSON: Okay. Okay. All right. I've got  
18 no further questions for this round. I'll turn it over  
19 to you, Mr. Sherry.

20 MR. SHERRY: Richard Sherry, FRA.

21 BY MR. SHERRY:

22 Q Of your 65 to 68 employees that you have  
23 underneath you, how many are strictly dedicated to the  
24 regional rail side? Or do they criss-cross a little  
25 bit? Or do you have ones that are strictly for

1 regional rail?

2 A They criss-cross, but based on experience, like,  
3 you know, Shandel and Clarence typically get the  
4 assignments for that, and so does Dave -- well, Dave  
5 Wu now got promoted to an operational director, and  
6 Bobby get assigned, is why you've seen most of those  
7 two folks or those four folks in most of these type of  
8 incidents because they come from that side.

9 Q So you have four? Is that what --

10 A Yeah. Yeah.

11 Q Okay. Do you feel that you would need more than  
12 four?

13 A Well, at this point in time, it's all hands on  
14 deck and we've got everyone, you know, the -- well, let  
15 me just also preface the investigators are whoever's on  
16 call, so we have all 12 of those that respond to that  
17 as well. You know, right now, what we're looking at,  
18 we have to assess where, you know, where are we having  
19 the biggest issues, what we're doing, what's going on,  
20 and, you know, how we're going to meet the biggest  
21 needs. So, yeah, I think that's under question right  
22 now.

23 Q I mean, I understand SEPTA's a huge operation  
24 with buses and trains and everything. So you have  
25 four with knowledge of rail, so to say. All right.

1 A Yeah. I mean, I'm sorry, let me also say some  
2 people on the construction side also have knowledge of  
3 rail too that we have, you know, from a, you know,  
4 mechanical standpoint too.

5 Q Okay.

6 A So there's probably a couple more people in that  
7 crew.

8 Q Has under rail like under railroad safety or, you  
9 know --

10 A Well, yeah. They know, like, you know, the  
11 switch gear, you know, and the switches and track  
12 safety and things like that, so they come from  
13 maintenance.

14 Q Do they know railroad worker protection and all  
15 that?

16 A Oh, yeah, they're all part of that.

17 Q Oh, okay. Okay.

18 A Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. So like Ben, Ben Shine  
19 would be one. Hutchinson, Tom Hutchinson would be  
20 another. There's probably a third one that comes from  
21 that group. I'm sorry, I forgot about that group.

22 Q And I know at your level, are you aware about the  
23 safe job procedures bus side, rail side, and  
24 everything like that?

25 A You mean in general, like that we have safe

1 procedures?

2 Q Safe job procedures?

3 A Yeah.

4 Q In the shops themselves, we were told multiple  
5 times this week for their safe job procedures of how  
6 to complete a task, how to do a repair, there was only  
7 50 percent safe job procedures. Is that a concern for  
8 your safety, Systems Safety?

9 A Absolutely. Absolutely.

10 Q What can we do or what's in place to get that up  
11 to a better number?

12 A Well, I think as part of all this that's coming  
13 out, everything again, you know, I came in here trying  
14 to find out what I knew and what I didn't know, you  
15 know, and as I continue to learn, as I said before,  
16 I'll continue to get smarter and say, okay, now do we  
17 morph our strategy, our plan, to address this area as  
18 well, right? So I think the way to assess that, Rich,  
19 is to say, okay, which of those job procedures would  
20 we consider critical or high risk tasks, right? Those  
21 would be the ones that if there's 50 percent, maybe 10  
22 percent, we've got to do those right away. That's got  
23 to be at the top of the list. Maybe that's 10, maybe  
24 that's two, but we need to address those and then work  
25 through the list at what we think is the appropriate,

1 you know, pace through that.

2 Q Since the first February incident, and you came  
3 on board in November, what have you learned about the  
4 rail side?

5 A Just in general? I mean, just --

6 Q Yeah, I mean, like, what really jumped out at you  
7 that you had no clue was a problem or --

8 A Yeah. Well, yeah. Well, okay. So just as you  
9 guys, as you know, I said, you can tell from my  
10 history I gave you I'm not from this business, right?  
11 So, certainly, from the rail side, you would think  
12 that when the cars are 50 years old, they're  
13 meticulously cared for, you know, and found out, you  
14 know, we didn't have parts and everything and found  
15 out, certainly, that's a surprise to me, the -- what  
16 we have to do to keep them on the rails, you know,  
17 with parts and how we -- but also what shocks me in  
18 any business I have, and I'm saying this on the record,  
19 I said this to Scott, is like the fact that we have  
20 people who would say I'm just not doing this even  
21 though you told me this is really important. I mean,  
22 that just -- and there's always one person in the crowd  
23 who will do that. But, when we have multiple crews,  
24 it shows that there's systematic, serious systematic  
25 issues that we have to deal with drastically and

1 expeditiously.

2           So that's probably the most shocking thing to me  
3 because it's -- I talked to a lot of the operators. I  
4 have not gone to the head end of stuff. I feel like  
5 actually I don't want to interrupt them and be the  
6 cause of something. I watch them, you know, and see  
7 how they run it. But I think the most shocking thing  
8 is really that part of it about the fact that there's  
9 just this -- and I think it's a true complacency. I  
10 hate to use the word complacency, but it's a disregard  
11 for the risk, and that's just the true meaning of  
12 complacency.

13 Q     Yes. That'll kind of roll into my final question  
14 here. Multiple times in these interviews with Todd  
15 and Brett today you used the word culture. What do  
16 you think the word -- what do you think the culture is  
17 here? What is your observe of the culture here?

18 A     Yeah. Okay. So I think the culture here is one  
19 of that the team that is on the ground dictates how  
20 things are to be and not the other way around. We're  
21 not leading the team in the culture, right?  
22 Management may come and go. Management may not be  
23 doing what they need to do, but the team's doing that  
24 and they develop that culture in that void because,  
25 you know, we need to be able to be leading the

1 culture, building the culture, you know, living the  
2 culture. And to me, the culture, the void has been  
3 filled by employees, and that's not where we want to  
4 be.

5 Q So let me just get -- make sure I understand it.

6 A Yeah, yeah.

7 Q You're saying that the boots on the ground, the  
8 workers are telling management what they're going to do  
9 and how it's going to be done, and you're not going to  
10 tell them?

11 A I think that's kind of what --

12 Q That's how you see the culture here?

13 A Yeah.

14 Q Okay. And what has to be changed to change that  
15 culture from your -- from Systems Safety?

16 A Yeah. Well, we have to change the leaders, our  
17 leadership. There's got to be key people who can drive  
18 the change in the culture because you can send someone  
19 in, you know, just to maybe show them. It's not going  
20 to do it. You have to have the right people in the  
21 right roles, and you all have to be working on rowing  
22 the same direction. And then you have to  
23 systematically go down. You have to start at the top  
24 and go down the next level and go down the next level  
25 and go down the next level.

1 I'll tell you one example that we used when I was  
2 in Boyertown, Pennsylvania, we had a room and the  
3 plant manager said we've got to change the culture, I  
4 was the Safety and Environmental Manager, said in  
5 front of all the supervisors that were in the room and  
6 he said this. And Scott and I have talked about this  
7 and said, hey, we're going to -- you know, we've got  
8 to, to survive, we've got to do things differently and  
9 our safety environmental, you know, our culture sucks,  
10 you know, basically. We can't do what we always did.  
11 You can't, you know, listen to the union. We run the  
12 facilities. We run the facilities. We have to be the  
13 leaders. We have to act like the leaders, we have to  
14 be the leaders.

15 Here's the bar before, it's going here, okay? I  
16 understand you may not want to be here. I'm not going  
17 to force you to be. HR's sitting in the corner. We're  
18 happy to make you transition, you know. No harm, no  
19 foul. But you will transition because, if you stay,  
20 the bar's now here and there's no quarter given, you  
21 know, to meet that. And that's what we need to do here  
22 for the people that we have stay. Say, look, we need  
23 to do this and we need to do this now, quickly.

24 MR. SHERRY: No further questions.

25 MR. KRAHOLIK: Todd Kraholik, NTSB. I'm going to

1 pass it to Brett.

2 MR. JOHNSON: All right. Brett Johnson, NTSB.

3 BY MR. JOHNSON:

4 Q Hey. So, at SEPTA, is there a -- does your  
5 department either hold a call or host meetings or  
6 participate in meetings where discussion of, you know,  
7 injury trending or injuries or accidents happen so  
8 that everybody, you know, the managers on the system  
9 will be aware of the same message? Is there anything  
10 like that that SEPTA currently does?

11 A We send out a monthly report --

12 Q Okay.

13 A -- that goes out to everybody. We talk at a high  
14 level with the GM team and we show some trends with  
15 some things. We've got, like, 18 different metrics.  
16 We don't go over each one on everything, and we also  
17 talk with the board about our metrics. We talk about  
18 our board a lot with the metrics.

19 Q So what metrics are you referencing there?

20 A You know, it's at high level, you know, injury  
21 trends, it's derailments, it's track -- or fires. Let's  
22 see, what else is on that list? Signal violations.  
23 I'm drawing a blank now.

24 Q I'm sure there's others like trespassers and stuff  
25 like that

1 A Yeah, trespassers.

2 Q I got you.

3 A You know, assaults.

4 Q Sure.

5 A You know, just there's ones -- and we look more  
6 towards trends because we're trying to look at where we  
7 are and what we're doing about it.

8 Q Got you. So who manages that data? Is that  
9 someone in your department or is there, like, a --

10 A It's my department.

11 Q Okay. So your department, and I believe you said  
12 something, is that the data people, you have two or  
13 three data people that work for you that do that?

14 A Mm-hmm.

15 Q Do they -- so, if there's an injury and somebody  
16 gets hurt, they're the -- are those folks that are on  
17 the data side, do they take care of all the legal  
18 paperwork to the reg --

19 A No.

20 Q All right. Who does that?

21 A That would be worker's compensation or the risk  
22 management group, which is basically like a worker's  
23 comp group, FELA group, that does all that piece of  
24 it.

25 Q Okay. So risk management, and they don't roll up

1 under safety?

2 A No, they'll roll up under legal.

3 Q Legal? Got you. So legal, the legal side does  
4 that. Okay. Got you. So, if injuries are -- if  
5 there's -- you know, let's just say there's 10 injuries  
6 this month and that all goes to that department, how  
7 do you find out about those 10 injuries?

8 A Well, what I find out about is they'll send a  
9 report over to, Gina's my lead data person, the  
10 director, and she'll assemble the report. I only find  
11 out about specific events either if I know about it  
12 through my texts and I'm inquiring about what happened.  
13 You know, if there's someone say let's just say, you  
14 know, they broke their leg.

15 Q Okay.

16 A You know, we'll do an investigation, I'll know  
17 what happened.

18 Q Mm-hmm.

19 A And we'll do that. And also what I started doing,  
20 just so you also know, is to get to the part about  
21 having discussions is once a month I'll pick an  
22 incident, we talk about it with the GM team. It could  
23 be an injury. It could be, you know, a derailment.  
24 And I do what I call a four block or one slide,  
25 description, root cause, corrective actions, you know,

1 and then photos so people understand. There's an  
2 educational piece in how everyone needs to engage and  
3 what we need to do.

4 So we're trying to educate our team leaders to  
5 understand what this means and why it is important to  
6 them, so then what do we need them to do? So, to me,  
7 this is what I said about the whole data thing, it's  
8 got to be a lot better from an injury standpoint for  
9 us to communicate it.

10 Q I understand. So, when you have those meetings,  
11 if I am a conductor or a track employee or a craft  
12 employee, do I know about injuries that happen on the  
13 SEPTA network? Am I aware of those?

14 A Each LSC gets a quarterly report of their  
15 injuries for their LSC that applies to them.

16 Q And what is an L -- you said LLC?

17 A Location Safety Committee, LSC.

18 Q LSC, Location Safety.

19 A Right. So their safety committee gets that  
20 information and shares it and I believe it's posted,  
21 you know, I can check to be sure, but I think it's  
22 posted on their bulletin boards.

23 Q Okay.

24 A You know, some data about the injuries that  
25 they've had in their group. And they're supposed to

1 talk about the injuries and what are they going to do  
2 about it at their Location Safety Committees.

3 Q Okay. So it's through the safety committees that  
4 your people, your safety interface, you know, your  
5 safety front-line manager that works for you, who  
6 participates in these Local Safety Committees, they'll  
7 have discussion about the specifics or generalized  
8 specifics?

9 A Right.

10 Q And then that information is to be disseminated  
11 to the people?

12 A Correct.

13 Q The folks that drive trains, drive spikes and so  
14 forth?

15 A Yeah, and I'm not -- in my culture, in the culture  
16 that I would see, I'm not saying that -- I'm not going  
17 to tell you that it happens.

18 Q Okay. Now is that measured? Like, is there a  
19 measurement or documentation that, you know, these  
20 conversations are, these things are talked about at  
21 the safety committees?

22 A It should be in their, you know, it should be in  
23 their meeting minutes that says they covered them, you  
24 know, that they reviewed them, that they were shared  
25 or whatever in their quarterly meeting.

1 Q Okay. And where are those stored?

2 A We keep copies because we have to send it -- each  
3 committee -- it's supposed to go to all committee  
4 members when it's done, and we actually have to send a  
5 copy, we keep a copy of every one because monthly we  
6 have to submit it to Penn-DOT.

7 Q Okay. To the state?

8 A To the state.

9 Q Okay.

10 A So we have to make sure that we get every meeting  
11 minutes.

12 Q Understand.

13 A Because, otherwise, you know, we get asked for  
14 it.

15 Q Okay. And I'm winding down here. So what  
16 roadblocks do you have that you see need to be  
17 removed? You had mentioned data.

18 A Right.

19 Q Roadblocks to get Systems Safety to where you  
20 want it to be in two to five years. What roadblocks  
21 have got to come down today to make substantial  
22 change?

23 A Well, data is one thing. That's an enabler,  
24 right? That gives us some points of where we need to  
25 go to. I think the other roadblock is to -- it's

1 really the roadblock is -- I'm going to try to describe  
2 this. There's so much going on here, and I know  
3 there's a lot of people who also care. It's not really  
4 a roadblock, but it's like, you know, we've got the  
5 2026 stuff. We've got all this activity going on.  
6 We've got the union contract coming on. How do we keep  
7 you focus safety as the -- it's the number one thing  
8 that we do every day. You know, that's a mind set that  
9 we have to change, and so I think that's one of the  
10 things -- so I'd say that's an overall thing, it's not  
11 a roadblock, but it's something that's got to change.  
12 People need to start thinking like that. That's an out  
13 --

14 Q So how are you going to influence that at Systems  
15 Safety?

16 A So Systems Safety, I think one of the things  
17 that's got to happen is push people through and be  
18 committed to this leadership training to get through,  
19 to get that through there.

20 Q Okay.

21 A We also make the changes that we need to do in  
22 departments. I mean, you know, certain people here  
23 just in the last month are no longer here.

24 Q Okay.

25 A Okay? And that's happened before, you know,

1 already. You know, I even got rid of one -- I  
2 shouldn't say that. One person from my group has left  
3 six months ago --

4 Q Okay.

5 A -- right after the Crum Lynne fire, okay?

6 Q All right.

7 A So it's getting the right people to be the right  
8 leaders in that room.

9 Q Okay.

10 A All right. And then the full commitment to the  
11 process, you know, the change that we need to have  
12 happen across the board.

13 Q And in two to five years, what measurements or  
14 what details or what attributes or characteristics,  
15 whatever, you know, however we say it --

16 A Yeah.

17 Q -- will let you know that you're on the right  
18 track in being successful?

19 A Sure. When we, the front line -- two things, a  
20 couple things. One is when the front-line leaders and  
21 the employees can explain what their role is in  
22 safety, and it's --

23 Q Can they do that now?

24 A I would say most of them can.

25 Q Okay.

1 A Okay?

2 Q Mm-hmm.

3 A You know, because that's one of the reasons why  
4 I'm here, is to help to change part of that. And what  
5 their role is and how it leads them to do a good job  
6 every day, okay? And that's really their engagement.  
7 We have to have that front-line engagement, right?  
8 That's ultimately one of the things that will be it.  
9 But, along the way, you know, we can talk about the  
10 indexes, we can talk about the injuries. Those are  
11 outcomes. What are processes that are in place that  
12 are working?

13 I talked about the near misses and the incident  
14 reporting. So we look at what are the things that  
15 we're doing, I call them leading -- you know, you guys  
16 all know leading areas, right?

17 Q Mm-hmm.

18 A What are the leading areas, right? One of the  
19 leading areas is, you know, near misses can be one.  
20 Also the corrective actions. Are we completing them  
21 within a timely manner? You know, if we're getting  
22 them done, then we know that we're engaged in that part  
23 of the process. You know, what are the reviews that  
24 we're doing, you know, and the compliance checks, and  
25 are we showing improvement, you know, because we'll

1 never be at zero, and that's okay because, if we're at  
2 zero, then we're probably missing something.

3 So what are we doing to get better and are we  
4 continuously improving the process, you know, and are  
5 we continually doing the commitment to plan, do a  
6 check, and accept that safety is the most important  
7 value, and we live it every day through how we  
8 operate, you know, in the authority.

9 MR. JOHNSON: Got you. All right. Thank you,  
10 Brad. I've got no further questions. Mr. Sherry?

11 MR. SHERRY: Richard Sherry, FRA.

12 BY MR. SHERRY:

13 Q Just one further question. This leadership  
14 program that you're saying you guys rolled out, the  
15 learning program, schooling would it be, are people  
16 that just want to be managers being enrolled in this,  
17 or are you guys hand-picking people that you feel will  
18 be good managers for SEPTA into this program or both?

19 A I don't know how to answer that one, Rich, because  
20 I'm not sure. At that point, we're starting people who  
21 are managers now.

22 Q What's that?

23 A We're starting with people who are managers now  
24 and supervisors.

25 Q Oh, okay. So this isn't upcoming managers. This

1 is a program for current managers to go into?

2 A I think there's also probably some high potentials  
3 that are getting selected to go, you know, in there,  
4 but we know that at a baseline, our managers and  
5 supervisors need this as much as upcoming ones do, so  
6 it's primarily getting through those folks first who  
7 are existing.

8 Q I misunderstood.

9 A Yeah. I'm sorry. I'm glad you're clarifying.

10 Q So your front-line managers are going through  
11 this program. It's not people that are coming up  
12 through the ranks of the boots on the ground to be  
13 managers? This is your managers already?

14 A Right. Yeah. One of my deputy chiefs is going  
15 through the program right now.

16 Q Okay. How many in this program are allotted  
17 every so many months? Or how does that work?

18 A This is the first, they call them cohorts. I  
19 think there's 20 or 30 maybe per cohort, you know, and  
20 they're going to be staggering them. I mean,  
21 certainly, you can talk to the training folks, or I  
22 can give you a slide deck if you want on it.

23 Q Is it in-house training?

24 A In-house training through our training group, our  
25 culture group, under Emanuela.

1 Q But the trainers are actually SEPTA employees?

2 A Yes.

3 Q Okay.

4 A And there's different modules. There's like  
5 Module 8 or 10 is around safety, and we haven't  
6 developed that one yet. They're only on, like, Module  
7 2. So we're kind of going to be working with them to  
8 develop the Systems Safety module.

9 Q Okay.

10 A So we'll talk about all the things we talked about  
11 today. How to be a good safety leader, what the  
12 expectations are, and what does that look like?  
13 Because one of the things, I'll just close it, and  
14 we're getting close here, is, like, what I've done in  
15 the past is, like, look, you can put results in, zero  
16 injuries. But that's a result, right? But, if I want  
17 to have a supervisor, what does that look like that I  
18 need to do every day? Okay. And we would have, like,  
19 for a supervisor, maybe it's one audit a week. Maybe  
20 it's two audits a week. Maybe it's three observations  
21 a week. Maybe it's lead a safety talk every day. You  
22 know, check those boxes. You know, not just literally  
23 just check them for the sake of doing it. But, if you  
24 can do these well, you're doing the right things,  
25 leading indicators that will get us the right results

1 that we need you to do. And every business is  
2 different along those lines.

3 But we need to be able to define that, and that's  
4 what this leadership cohort will do, is also help us  
5 do that. But, in the meantime, if we don't get the  
6 employee behind this, we just talked about it earlier,  
7 and get over this roadblock, I can develop all the  
8 lists I want on what they want them to do, they'll just  
9 check the box and just do it to do it and it ain't  
10 going to work, you know. So sorry.

11 MR. JOHNSON: No further questions.

12 MR. KRAHOLIK: All right, Brad, do you have  
13 anything you would like to add? Anything you want to  
14 say?

15 MR. OKONIEWSKI: I think I said most of it. I  
16 mean, sorry. I mean, literally, you know, I came  
17 here, you know, because, in November, not because I  
18 just wanted to be here. I thought this was something  
19 that I could really help make a difference with. And  
20 I admit this is a tall task, much taller than I  
21 thought it would be in an established organization.

22 I've worked with some pretty tough unions and  
23 pretty tough stuff over the years, but this is really  
24 deep, and I've seen things all over the world which  
25 were easier, like, to deal with, and in this

1 concentrated area how challenging this is. But I can  
2 assure you that it's not for lack of effort of people  
3 like Scott and Frank and Kate and other people who are  
4 the right people here that are going to do things. We  
5 just need to, you know, get it done with some support  
6 from folks to just let us get it done, you know.

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

9 MR. OKONIEWSKI: Of course not. Anytime.

10 MR. KRAHOLIK: All right. On behalf of the NTSB,  
11 thank you for your time and cooperation.

12 MR. OKONIEWSKI: All right.

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

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CERTIFICATE

CASE TITLE: SEPTA Fire  
ACCIDENT NO.: RRD25FR006  
LOCATION: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
DATE: September 30, 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.

D

  
Marcia Thurmond  
Official Transcriber  
Heritage Reporting Corporation

Heritage  poration



I, Brad Okoniewski, have read the foregoing pages of a copy of my interview that was held on September 30, 2025. These pages constitute a true and accurate transcription of same with the exception of the following amendments, additions, deletions or corrections:

<u>PAGE NO:</u>	<u>LINE NO:</u>	<u>CHANGE AND REASON FOR CHANGE</u>
12	13	not "rail, trans" → rail transit
12	25	EM & C not "EMMC"
13	12	Need to review phrase "To go for it" does not make sense
18	14	should be "fines" not "finds"
19	13	missed word → <del>pp.</del> should "not" participate [insert "not"]
27	12	not "caps" should be "CAPs" - corrective action plans
27	13	not "DIH" should be "DIHI"

I declare that I have read my statements and that it is true and correct subject to any changes in the form or substance entered here.

Date: 11/14/25

Witness:



I, Brad Okoniewski, have read the foregoing pages of a copy of my interview that was held on September 30, 2025. These pages constitute a true and accurate transcription of same with the exception of the following amendments, additions, deletions or corrections:

<u>PAGE NO:</u>	<u>LINE NO:</u>	<u>CHANGE AND REASON FOR CHANGE</u>
30	17	should be "CAPs" not "Cups"
35	11	not "koran" should be spelled "Koron"
42	18	not "target" should be "tiger" - twice in this line
44	3	"Shandel" is spelled "Chardal"
44	4/5	"Dave" "wu" is one word "Dawud"
65	10	phrase "so sorry" makes no sense in this context - needs to be reviewed for correction

I declare that I have read my statements and that it is true and correct subject to any changes in the form or substance entered here.

Date: 11/14/25

Witness: 