

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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THE EXPLOSION OF APARTMENT  
BUILDING 8701 OF FLOWER BRANCH  
APARTMENTS IN SILVER SPRING,  
MARYLAND ON AUGUST 10, 2016

Accident No.: DCA16FP003

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Interview of: CHESTER WHITE

Chillum, Maryland

Friday,  
August 19, 2016

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: RAVI CHHATRE  
Investigator-in-Charge

## APPEARANCES:

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National Transportation Safety Board

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National Transportation Safety Board  
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I N D E X

| <u>ITEM</u>                 | <u>PAGE</u> |
|-----------------------------|-------------|
| Interview of Chester White: |             |
| By Mr. Chhatre              | 6           |
| By Unidentified Speaker     | 17          |
| By Mr. Chhatre              | 18          |
| By Mr. Emeaba               | 24          |
| By Mr. Amroliwala           | 32          |
| By Mr. Price                | 36          |
| By Ms. Gunaratnam           | 38          |
| By Mr. Chhatre              | 40          |
| By Mr. Emeaba               | 42          |

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I N T E R V I E W

1  
2 MR. CHHATRE: On the record.

3 Good afternoon. Today is Friday, August 19, 2016. We are  
4 currently in Chillum, Maryland -- Chillum, Maryland, Washington  
5 Gas, Chillum Station. We are meeting in regards to the  
6 investigation of explosion of Building 8701, Arliss Street, Flower  
7 Branch Apartments, Silver Spring, Maryland. The accident occurred  
8 on August 10, 2016. And the NTSB investigation number for this  
9 accident is December -- I'm sorry, DCA16FP003.

10 My name is Ravi Chhatre. That is R-a-v-i, C-h-h-a-t-r-e.  
11 I'm with the National Transportation Safety Board located in  
12 Washington, D.C., and I am investigator in charge of this  
13 accident.

14 I would like to start by notifying everyone present in this  
15 room that we are recording this interview for transcription at a  
16 later date. All parties will have a chance to review the  
17 transcripts if and when they are completed.

18 Also, I would like to inform Mr. Chester White that you are  
19 permitted to have one other person present with you during the  
20 interview. This is a person of your choice: your supervisor,  
21 friend, family member, or if you choose, no one at all.

22 Please state for the record your full name, spelling of your  
23 name, contact information such as work phone, work email address,  
24 and a work mailing address -- no personal information -- and whom  
25 you have chosen to be present with you during your interview.

1 MR. WHITE: My name is Chester White. Spell that  
2 C-h-e-s-t-e-r, W-h-i-t-e. I'm a service tech out of Rockville  
3 Station for Washington Gas. Cell phone number, work cell phone  
4 number is [REDACTED].

5 MR. CHHATRE: And whom you have chosen to be with you?

6 MR. WHITE: Spencer Nichols.

7 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Now I'd like to go around the room and  
8 have each person introduce themselves. Please state your name,  
9 spelling of your name, your title, and the organization that you  
10 represent, and your business contact information such as work  
11 phone, work email address or work postal address. Starting from  
12 my left.

13 MR. EMEABA: Kalu Kelly Emeaba. K-a-l-u, K-e-l-l-y,  
14 E-m-e-a-b-a. I'm an NTSB investigator. My phone number is [REDACTED]

15 [REDACTED]  
16 MR. AMROLIWALA: My name is Rashmikant Amroliwala,  
17 R-a-s-h-m-i-k-a-n-t, and last name is A-m-r-o-l-i-w-a-l-a. I work  
18 with the State of Maryland, Public Service Commission, pipeline  
19 safety engineer. My phone number is [REDACTED].

20 MR. STAEBLER: My name is Douglas Staebler,  
21 S-t-a-e-b-l-e-r. My phone is [REDACTED] I am the senior vice  
22 president of operations for Washington Gas.

23 MR. PRICE: My name is Steve Price. I'm the division head of  
24 system operations at Washington Gas. My cell phone number is [REDACTED]

25 [REDACTED].

1 MR. NICHOLS: Spencer Nichols, Associate General Counsel,  
2 Washington Gas, [REDACTED].

3 MR. CHHATRE: Thank you very much.

4 Oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead, Rachael.

5 MS. GUNARATNAM: Rachael Gunaratnam, R-a-c-h-a-e-l,  
6 G-u-n-a-r-a-t-n-a-m. NTSB HAZMAT investigator. Number is  
7 [REDACTED].

8 MR. CHHATRE: Thanks.

9 INTERVIEW OF CHESTER WHITE

10 BY MR. CHHATRE:

11 Q. Mr. White, just give me your background and formal education,  
12 experience, how many years you are with Washington Gas, what your  
13 duties. I mean just general background.

14 A. Okay. Currently I'm a service tech out of Northwest Station  
15 for Washington Gas. In December will be 16 years I've been  
16 employed with Washington Gas.

17 As far as the training, I started out as meter reader, worked  
18 in T&D, did service mechanic work, and now I'm a service  
19 technician for Washington Gas. As far as training, we go through  
20 extensive training, be it OQ tests, practicals where we have to  
21 perform certain duties, and they take that very seriously. We  
22 have to pass it. And if we are not qualified, I don't believe  
23 they would have us doing what we do.

24 Q. Okay. So as a service tech, what are your responsibilities?

25 A. Basically a service tech is like a first responder to any

1 emergency. If it's like a gas leak or inside leak, we're the  
2 first ones to respond to that job. We go in with our test  
3 machines, and see if we can find the leak. We also do boring test  
4 holes around the building walls, along any service running  
5 adjacent to the building, and we check all our Washington Gas  
6 gas-related meters and buildings, so anything --

7 Q. So if a odor call comes in, then the service technician such  
8 as you will be dispatched?

9 A. Dispatched to that address. And depending on if it's inside  
10 -- whether we do a inside or outside leak, we still have to test.  
11 If it's inside, we still have to test outside to make sure that  
12 there's nothing outside coming in. And same thing if it's  
13 outside, we go inside and make sure that there's nothing coming  
14 inside the building. Or in service like manholes, water boxes,  
15 sewer boxes and various things of that nature.

16 Q. So if you discover a leak, can you actually close the service  
17 valve or main valve? Are you qualified to do that?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. Okay. And are you OQ qualified?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Are you current in your qualification?

22 A. This is the one.

23 Q. Okay. I mean, we believe -- if you tell me that you are OQ  
24 qualified, I'll --

25 A. Yeah, OQ qualified.

1 Q. -- take it you are OQ qualified.

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Honestly, this is a fact-finding mission. It's not a court  
4 of law. We are just trying to -- you have some -- you are  
5 valuable person to us. So if you have information, that's all we  
6 are trying to get at. So don't, don't feel uncomfortable at all.  
7 If we ask a certain question, please answer it, because we don't  
8 understand it, not because -- there is no trick question in this  
9 conversation at all. So just be comfortable.

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Chester, can I see the OQ card?

11 Thanks.

12 BY MR. CHHATRE:

13 Q. So have you ever done any work in the -- what I call ground  
14 zero building, 8701, that you recall in the recent past? And if  
15 you need to look at this sheet by all means.

16 A. At 9/27/2012.

17 Q. I'm sorry, when?

18 A. September 27, 2012.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. I was at 8701, Unit 201, and that was to do a what we call a  
21 turn-on, turn gas on.

22 Q. You see like three occasions?

23 A. And I also was there for a leak at 8703 on the street. It  
24 was a outside leak.

25 Q. Okay. Let's just go quickly one sheet at a time.



1 A. Okay.

2 Q. And then maybe just tell us what you did. I just want to  
3 make sure that I'm looking at the right --

4 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Which one are you going to start with  
5 first?

6 THE WITNESS: I guess 8701.

7 BY MR. CHHATRE:

8 Q. Give me the date. I think I can sort from the date.

9 A. 201 -- September 27, 2012.

10 MS. GUNARATNAM: It's right here. No, it's another one.

11 MR. CHHATRE: September?

12 MS. GUNARATNAM: 2012.

13 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

14 BY MR. CHHATRE:

15 Q. So tell us what did you do on this particular call, if you  
16 can recall? If you want to refresh your memory, do that. But if  
17 you do not recall, that's fine too; just tell me you don't recall  
18 anything and we'll move on.

19 A. Well, 8701 Arliss Street, 2000 -- I mean 201, I was  
20 dispatched to do a turn-on. That's turning gas on at the meter  
21 and lighting of the appliances.

22 Q. So you are turning the gas on, on that?

23 A. Gas on.

24 Q. So did you have to go in the basement to do that or you can  
25 just do it with your computer from outside?

1 A. No. You have to go to the actual meter --

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. -- and turn the gas on.

4 Q. Do you remember how the meters look like and where the meters  
5 were?

6 A. I can't actually remember that.

7 Q. Okay. So what do you do to turn the meter on?

8 A. First you change out the washers, and I remove the -- well,  
9 you remove the disk, change out washers, turn -- tighten up the  
10 swivels, turn the gas on, and you do a house line test. What that  
11 is, that's a 5-minute test to make sure that the house line is not  
12 fastened. Once you do that --

13 Q. I'm sorry. Educate me. So what -- you do this all the time,  
14 we don't. So tell me what exactly what you do.

15 A. So a house line test is where you -- at the meter you mark  
16 it, and you mark where the hand is. If that hand was to move past  
17 your mark, that means somewhere along the line --

18 Q. There's a leak.

19 A. -- on the house line, there's a leak.

20 Q. Oh, okay, okay.

21 A. Once you do that, if you don't have a house line leak, you  
22 soap up the immediate build-up and everything. Also where it  
23 comes in at, we have to put what we call bar test holes down. We  
24 have to test over near the building wall to make sure there is no  
25 gas possibly outside that could come in. Because any time you

1 turn gas on, you have to check inside and outside. So that would  
2 be where the water might come through, sewer, electrical, put a  
3 hole down, and we use our calibrated CGI machines to test for the  
4 outside leaks, if there are any leaks out there.

5 Q. Okay. So you'll be checking outside service line, is that  
6 what you'll be checking, or what you are checking outside?

7 A. You're checking where the service comes at --

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. -- into the building.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. Because that -- you have to check inside, but you also have  
12 to check outside.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. And that's where we put a bar test hole down and use a test  
15 machine.

16 Q. Okay. And so you checked everything, everything is okay, and  
17 then that's it?

18 A. And once you find out that everything is okay, you can  
19 proceed to light the appliances.

20 Q. So when you turn the gas on, the gas is now going into the  
21 building, if somebody turns the gas on? I mean, I'm trying to  
22 understand what --

23 A. Usually apartment building has a rack.

24 Q. Right.

25 A. So you will turn that meter on as -- to that apartment, check

1 it, do a house line test, check it. Also you do your checks  
2 outside. Once you establish that there's no gas inside or  
3 outside, you can proceed to turn the appliances on.

4 Q. Okay. So you're looking for the leaks outside of --

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. And how will you do that? By --

7 A. By a bar test hole.

8 Q. Bar hole?

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. Okay. Have you done that before?

11 A. I do it all the time.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. That's part of our procedure.

14 Q. Yes. Okay. So anything unusual that you remember happened  
15 on September 27, 2011 [sic]?

16 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: 2012.

17 BY MR. CHHATRE:

18 Q. No, '12. I'm sorry, 2012.

19 A. Not that I can recall. If it was anything that I found  
20 unusual, I would have addressed it to the dispatcher and had -- if  
21 it's a leak outside, I would have had somebody dispatched out to  
22 that location to fix the leak.

23 Q. Okay. So nothing unusual that you noticed on the meter rack?

24 A. No.

25 Q. Okay. Now when you are there to just turn the meter on, do

1 you also look at the service as it comes to --

2 A. Through --

3 Q. -- the regulator and --

4 A. Yeah. We use a calibrate machine to check along the riser  
5 buildup.

6 Q. And is there a company checklist of items that you are to do?  
7 Like on this call do you have -- do you get a checklist saying do  
8 this, do this, do this?

9 A. Well, when you're doing a turn-on, you already know your  
10 steps that you have to do.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. It's not like we have it written down. We get trained to  
13 where you know what you're supposed to do.

14 Q. Okay. So it's going to be more on the experience-based  
15 process. You know, you have been doing this so long, so you know  
16 what steps to take. Is that what you're saying?

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. You get trained to the point where -- and you do it every day  
20 repetition, so yeah.

21 Q. But if you need, can you get a document? Say for some reason  
22 if you say, well, let me see if I did this or not, let me double-  
23 check, is there a document available to you --

24 A. We have --

25 Q. -- upon request or?

- 1 A. We have O&M manuals we can refer --
- 2 Q. Okay. You do have all these steps in there?
- 3 A. Yes.
- 4 Q. Okay. Are you required to carry the manual on your truck?
- 5 A. The manuals are on our CAD.
- 6 Q. Okay. On computer. So you can access that?
- 7 A. Yes.
- 8 Q. So it's just as good as carrying on your truck.
- 9 A. Carrying the manuals, yeah. And we get those updated, just
- 10 like we get our machines calibrated.
- 11 Q. Right. Now do you carry any meters with you to look for a
- 12 leak? Like if you feel like there's some gas, you know, do a
- 13 search, do you carry any --
- 14 A. We carry Rangers, Rover, and also we use a --
- 15 Q. I mean, these model numbers. I'm just trying to find out
- 16 really CGI or --
- 17 A. Yeah, we have three types, three types of machines that we
- 18 usually -
- 19 Q. Okay.
- 20 A. -- can use.
- 21 Q. And which are those?
- 22 A. The Rover, spelled R-o-v-e-r.
- 23 Q. Okay. And is that a flame ionization or?
- 24 A. It's not like a flame pack.
- 25 Q. Do you use it to -- do you use that to walk above the ground

1 over a distance?

2 A. The Rover you have a device where you can walk across the  
3 area. It's not like a flame pack, but it has a suction that you  
4 can press it on the ground, and it --

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. -- it will give you a reading.

7 Q. And you have CGI on your truck?

8 A. CGI machine, and we also carry the Sensit. That's like a CGI  
9 machine. It doesn't give a actual reading. It beeps and it red  
10 lights.

11 Q. Okay. I'm not familiar with that, but -- okay. So nothing  
12 unusual on this particular event?

13 A. No. I didn't find anything.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. I believe the only thing that they had that actually ran on  
16 gas was the stove.

17 Q. Believe what?

18 A. I know I checked the stove. It said -- in my notes it said  
19 re-lit gas range.

20 Q. Where is that in the report? I'm sorry.

21 A. It's on 9/27. It's the -- I believe the last page.

22 Q. Okay. Turn gas on. All tests good. Re-lit gas range. Is  
23 that where you are reading?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Okay. And when is the next time you went there?

1 A. The next time I was actually at 8703 Arliss Street.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. And that was for a outside leak.

4 Q. What is the date again? August 19th?

5 A. 9/5/2013.

6 Q. 9/5/2013. Yeah, I see it, 9/5/2013. Okay.

7 A. And I was out there for a leak call.

8 Q. Okay. Where is that on the front page? Where is it I should  
9 look for that?

10 MS. GUNARATNAM: Last page.

11 MR. CHHATRE: Last page, okay.

12 MS. GUNARATNAM: Very last page.

13 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. Very last page, okay.

14 BY MR. CHHATRE:

15 Q. All right, 82 percent gas leak, 6 feet from building wall.

16 Educate me what does it mean in simple English?

17 A. Okay. Six feet from the building wall is anything within 10  
18 feet or closer, we consider that a code 1. So at this particular  
19 time, I did my what we call bar testing. Within 6 feet, I had 82  
20 percent.

21 Q. LEL or 82 percent of gas?

22 A. Eighty-two percent gas.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. In a bar test hole.

25 Q. Oh, okay. And it was 6 feet from the wall.



1 A. Six feet from the building wall.

2 Q. Do you recall either front, back, side?

3 A. It was at the front.

4 Q. Okay. So the building as you enter you saw -- did it say  
5 where? I mean the building is big. Do you know where? Will it  
6 tell you?

7 A. It was right -- I know the service came in through the front,  
8 and it was like 6 feet off of that. That's why I was getting 82  
9 percent, and it was looking like it was directly over the gas  
10 service.

11 Q. Do you have a map that maybe you can point out to us where --  
12 for the building? Do you know? Can you draw something and show  
13 me where it is or?

14 A. Yeah, I can draw you something. These are some steps --

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Can I ask a question while he's doing  
16 that?

17 MR. CHHATRE: Sure.

18 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

19 Q. Chester, you actually remember this building, that you're  
20 drawing it from memory?

21 A. Vaguely.

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. I remember that day because I knew when I had that leak, I  
24 turned it in to dispatch, I can remember the crew that came out --

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. -- and did it.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. Because the front of the -- in the front of the building, if  
4 you look across the street, it's a parking lot, and then it's a  
5 gas station right next to like the empty parking lot.

6 MR. CHHATRE: That sounds about right.

7 THE WITNESS: And where I was getting the 82 percent at, it  
8 was within priority 1 code. So I called the dispatcher, and told  
9 them that I would be standing on the job, and they sent -- do you  
10 want to know the crew that they sent?

11 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

12 BY MR. CHHATRE:

13 Q. Yeah. They sent what --

14 A. They sent crew 711, and that's in the notes also.

15 Q. You said crew what?

16 A. 7-1-1.

17 Q. 7-1-1.

18 A. Um-hum.

19 Q. And when you say crew 711, some companies have one-person  
20 crews; some people -- companies have more than --

21 A. This was -- it was three guys.

22 Q. Three guys. Okay. Three people crew. Okay.

23 So I mean that is -- schematic is fine. Just draw whatever  
24 you -- and we'll just do like a schematic rather than a drawing.  
25 So just show where the building is -- across from a -- where the

1 gas station is and that kind of stuff.

2 A. Well, if you -- if we're looking at it this way, across right  
3 here would be where the parking lot is, and the gas station would  
4 be across there. And right here, within 6 feet, is where I got  
5 the 82 percent. So I called the dispatcher and let them know that  
6 I have to stand on this leak. Any time we get a code 1, we have  
7 to stand and keep checking and make sure.

8 At that time, waiting for the crew, I went inside to make  
9 sure no gas was getting in. And I believe there was a maintenance  
10 guy that was there. I think it was a Spanish guy.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. And he was assisting me to get into the building. When the  
13 crew pulled up, I told them what I had, and from that point they  
14 took over.

15 Q. They took over?

16 A. Right.

17 Q. That is 8701.

18 A. 87- --

19 MS. GUNARATNAM: 03.

20 THE WITNESS: -- 03.

21 BY MR. CHHATRE:

22 Q. Oh, 8703. I'm sorry. Yeah, 8703. Okay. And do you know  
23 what happened after that?

24 A. Once the crew gets there, we are relieved. We have other  
25 jobs.

1 Q. You have done your job.

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. Staying on the site.

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. Crew comes. You follow --

6 A. They take over. I let them know initially what I have  
7 outside. When I go inside, I tell them I didn't get any readings  
8 inside. I checked the hallways, this and that. And once they  
9 arrive is their time to take over.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. So I couldn't tell you what they did --

12 Q. Sure.

13 A. -- because I was --

14 MR. CHHATRE: Could I get a report on this one that you guys  
15 had? Can I make a, make a note of the request, information  
16 request to get a copy of that?

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah. I think you have that already.

18 MR. CHHATRE: Oh, I already have it?

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I think so, yes.

20 MR. CHHATRE: Okay, good.

21 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I'll double-check.

22 MR. CHHATRE: I'll check. You check. If it's not there,  
23 just send it to me.

24 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay.

25 MR. CHHATRE: If it is there, no big deal.

1 BY MR. CHHATRE:

2 Q. Okay. So then the next one, any -- I think there's one more,  
3 right?

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. Or two more?

6 A. One more.

7 Q. One more. Okay.

8 A. And the next one is 8703, same building, but I believe the  
9 person in 104 might have called because it's addressed to that.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. And what it was, it was odor in laundry room and meter room.

12 Q. I'm sorry. Let me see, it's the -- number 204. Is that what  
13 we are looking at, 204 apartment?

14 A. 104. 8703 104.

15 Q. 6/24/16, right? Date?

16 A. No, 2/1 --

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No, that's --

18 THE WITNESS: -- 2013.

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That was Mr. Kirschner's --

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: 2/1/13.

21 MR. CHHATRE: 2/1/13. Okay. I got those two mixed up.

22 BY MR. CHHATRE:

23 Q. Okay. And that was on service line inside the building,  
24 outside the building?

25 A. Yeah. It was -- this leak was on a union.

1 Q. On?

2 A. Well, the union was leaking.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. What that means is -- the union is a compression-type fitting  
5 that you can tighten it up. When I found it, it was leaking a  
6 little bit. I soaped it up, found it leaking, tightened it up.  
7 That stopped the leak. Checked the rest of it and everything -- I  
8 didn't find anything.

9 Q. So for a leak like that how will you check? What machine you  
10 use to make sure -- is that a soap test or?

11 A. I used the Ranger and a soap test.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. And that's stated in the body of it.

14 Q. Okay. But in this particular case, you had to again go to  
15 the basement or?

16 A. It was, I believe, laundry room. It had to be in a basement.

17 Q. That's what I'm thinking.

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. But I don't --

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. But when you -- well, long ago, but bear with me. Do you  
22 even remember anything that -- you have a case like this, when you  
23 walk in, do you smell odor or you just had to go near that meter I  
24 guess or whatever the coupling to --

25 A. I had to have -- I'm not sure if I smelled it.

- 1 Q. Okay.
- 2 A. But I know I test with my machine and soap, and I found --
- 3 Q. And if the machine told you --
- 4 A. Machine led me to that.
- 5 Q. Okay.
- 6 A. And when I checked the rest of it, I didn't find anything.
- 7 Q. No smell. Okay.
- 8 A. Right.
- 9 Q. And let me see. What is the level of -- is there any amount  
10 given? Were the readings there on your meter or?
- 11 A. No. I didn't --
- 12 Q. Okay.
- 13 A. Once I found that it -- with the soap and the Ranger that it  
14 was leaking, I repaired it because it was on our side.
- 15 Q. Now did you take -- I guess what I'm saying is that would be  
16 very unusual to have, but can -- like if you have two leaks, you  
17 fix one.
- 18 A. Um-hum.
- 19 Q. And that leak's fixed and you leave. The other leak's --
- 20 A. No.
- 21 Q. That's what I'm asking you.
- 22 A. When you find one, you fix that, but you still check.
- 23 Q. Okay. That's what I'm asking.
- 24 A. Yeah.
- 25 Q. So you did that. Okay.

1 A. It's not that --

2 Q. But when you walked in, did you smell the gas?

3 A. I can't recall.

4 Q. Okay. That is fine. It was, what, 3 years ago?

5 A. Yeah. I know when it -- when they told me there was a leak  
6 in the -- where the meters were -- I'm not sure if it's inside  
7 where the laundry room is, but I know I checked everything and  
8 that's what I found that was leaking. So I --

9 Q. Was leaking. But the person who report the leak wasn't there  
10 waiting for you? He --

11 A. A lot of times --

12 Q. They just call and say there's a leak.

13 A. -- they'll call and they're not actually there.

14 Q. Okay. So in this case, somebody called. You show up, fix  
15 the leak, end of.

16 A. And that was it.

17 Q. Okay. Thank you very much. I'm glad you spend all the time  
18 with us.

19 MR. CHHATRE: Kelly.

20 BY MR. EMEABA:

21 Q. Mr. Chester --

22 A. Um-hum.

23 Q. -- this is Kalu Kelly Emeaba. You mentioned the work you did  
24 in turning on the meter, meter turn-on.

25 A. Um-hum.



1 Q. Okay. How long do you wait after meter turn-on to look for  
2 -- to perform the --

3 A. House line?

4 Q. -- house line, yes.

5 A. We do 5 minutes, but sometimes I do 5 and 10.

6 Q. Why?

7 A. Sometimes -- I do 5, but sometimes you'll do 10, because if  
8 you got a real slow leak it might not show up within 5. So I just  
9 wait the extra 5 minutes just to make sure.

10 Q. Okay. In line with that, can you tell me more about what the  
11 term you use call line pack? Can you tell me a little bit more  
12 about that?

13 A. What you mean? For the house line test?

14 Q. Yes.

15 A. That is when you turn the gas on and you tighten up the  
16 fittings, you want to make sure that any appliance -- what you do  
17 is you go inside. If they got shut-offs, you turn those off, and  
18 you wait at the meter for 5 -- they call it for 5 minutes, but  
19 like I said, sometime I'll do it 10. And all you're doing is line  
20 pack the line, you mark it where the half foot hand is.

21 Q. At what location?

22 A. On the upswing. I do it 12 o'clock. And you mark it and you  
23 watch it.

24 Q. Is that at the meter location?

25 A. At the meter. It's right on where the dial's at, and you

1 watch it for 5. Like I say, I do 10. And if it was to move, then  
2 I know that it's a leak somewhere on the house line. And with  
3 that, you can turn gas off.

4 Q. Do your gas turn-on procedure require the -- also the start  
5 of the water heater or some appliances within the house?

6 A. Do --

7 Q. When you conduct turn on --

8 A. Do I have to light --

9 Q. -- also go and light up the --

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. -- water heater?

12 A. We have to light appliances. You light the appliances --  
13 once you find out that the house line has passed, then that's when  
14 you go about and light the appliances.

15 Q. And are there other actions you have to take on the  
16 appliances?

17 A. When you lighting appliances, you have to look -- you have to  
18 use your machine. Once you turn that stuff, the shut-off back on,  
19 you have to test from that shut-off to like that gas valve. You  
20 have to test that. And once you lighting the actual appliance,  
21 you have to look at the flame to make sure that the flame is  
22 burning correctly. You have to check the flu. And make sure --  
23 you know, you have to also, even if you did a house line, you  
24 still have to use your machine after you turn gas on to check.  
25 Because anything on like a water tank, the pilot tubing can be

1 leaking. If you don't use your machine or soap or anything, you  
2 can miss a leak. So even though it pass the house line test when  
3 it's turned off at the shut-off, you still have to test from that  
4 point where it was shut off to that gas valve.

5 Q. Okay. Still on the work you perform at 8703 that which you  
6 found a leak --

7 A. Um-hum.

8 Q. -- within the union, you mentioned that the CGI led you and  
9 you did not smell gas.

10 A. A lot of times just because you don't smell gas, that don't  
11 mean that it's not a leak. If I go in and just try to use my  
12 smell to find something, I may miss it. So because I don't smell  
13 it, that doesn't mean that it's not there. So that's why I use  
14 the machines and soap to make sure. Because a lot of times you  
15 don't smell gas, but you find a leak.

16 Q. Was this call you went for because someone called or from  
17 routine?

18 A. I believe it was a customer that might have been in the  
19 laundry room and possibly thought they smelled gas, and it turned  
20 out that I found a leak. So I'm not -- I can't really recall if  
21 it was a customer that called or anything, but I know they  
22 dispatched that leak to me, and that is what I found.

23 Q. In the paperwork, Washington Gas, is that not being indicated  
24 how the call actually comes in?

25 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah, if you want to show them --

1 THE WITNESS: Yeah. It's sometimes in the body of the  
2 remarks, it'll say customer called or somebody smell it. But a  
3 lot of times that customer, they leave so you don't really get to  
4 talk to somebody. If we come across something like that, a lot of  
5 times we get it from maintenance, the maintenance guys. They'll  
6 say, well, we smell gas here, and they send us out and we test and  
7 locate it. Is that what you asking?

8 BY MR. EMEABA:

9 Q. Yes, and I just -- you are right. And my, you know, I'm  
10 pushing the question forward more to see on your paperwork where  
11 there is an indication of how that call came in.

12 A. I'm not --

13 MR. PRICE: If I can --

14 MR. EMEABA: Yes, please.

15 MR. PRICE: Let me go, for instance, to that 82 percent.  
16 That's the 9/5/2013. And so when you finish, when you --

17 MR. EMEABA: Please state your name.

18 MR. PRICE: Sorry. Steve Price. When you finish a job and  
19 you go to CAD, do you enter any comments yourself?

20 THE WITNESS: As far as --

21 MR. PRICE: As far as what you did?

22 THE WITNESS: On that, on this particular job, I state that I  
23 found 82 percent gas reading 6 feet from the building wall, and I  
24 state that the 711 came to work the job. Once that crew shows up,  
25 they have additional --

1 MR. PRICE: Right.

2 THE WITNESS: -- work that they fill out. My job is to state  
3 that I found the leak, where it was -- how close it was, and who  
4 came out.

5 MR. PRICE: Right. So okay. So I was just pointing it out  
6 as an example. If you go to that sheet on the 82 percent job  
7 where he found it, that line is the service tech's remarks that  
8 had been entered into the CAD. The two lines above are  
9 information that are provided on the CAD by the customer service  
10 rep or dispatch that identify sometimes who called in the leak,  
11 who the service tech should contact when they arrive. So -- and I  
12 -- there's two lines: one says account INST and one says account  
13 remark. And I can double-check this for you, but it's the account  
14 remark often has that information for the service tech as to how  
15 the leak was called in.

16 MR. EMEABA: Account remark?

17 MR. PRICE: Yeah, RMK. And it's abbreviated ACC RMK.

18 MR. CHHATRE: Can you show me where it's on this sheet here?

19 MS. GUNARATNAM: On the last page.

20 MR. CHHATRE: On the last.

21 MS. GUNARATNAM: What's the INST again?

22 MR. PRICE: That's what I have to check that abbreviation.  
23 It's also information as to who to contact, and I think it's also  
24 entered by the customer, by the call center or the dispatch, but I  
25 want to clarify that for you.

1 MS. GUNARATNAM: Okay.

2 MR. PRICE: I guess my point here is that that's information  
3 the service tech gets, not information that they have entered.

4 MR. EMEABA: So if -- this is Kalu Kelly Emeaba. If we want  
5 to find out all the calls that has come into Washington Gas office  
6 before it goes to the tech like Mr. Chester, we will be able to  
7 find it in your account remark document?

8 MR. PRICE: You're talking about if you want to find any odor  
9 calls that came in?

10 MR. EMEABA: Yes. Which document should contain that.

11 MR. PRICE: Right. And we have been asked to collect that.

12 MR. EMEABA: Yes.

13 MR. PRICE: So we would go to our customer service history by  
14 the address for whatever is being asked. If it's odor calls, leak  
15 calls, we'd draw off whatever is being asked and find, you know,  
16 any work records for that address.

17 MR. EMEABA: Okay. So, Mr. Price, does it indicate who calls  
18 in, who made that call to your company?

19 MR. PRICE: You have to look -- on which, on which order? On  
20 this 82 percent?

21 MR. EMEABA: Any other call, any other call, not just on this  
22 one. Just like this one, any other call. Do you have the  
23 document that indicate who calls it in to Washington Gas?

24 MR. PRICE: It is this CAD screen, CAD information, and there  
25 is information on who called.

1 MR. EMEABA: So on this one, can you show me it does indicate  
2 who calls?

3 MR. PRICE: Yeah, on which one, the 82 percent?

4 MR. EMEABA: Yes, please. Does it indicate who called?

5 MR. WHITE: The only thing I see that it might is where it  
6 says "see Jessica Amay (ph.)." I believe that's the person who  
7 initially called in.

8 BY MR. EMEABA:

9 Q. Okay, all right.

10 A. And a lot of times you will go and try to locate the person  
11 that called, sometimes they leave or sometimes you'll get a call  
12 from a passerby, person that's passing by. They smell gas,  
13 they'll call it in, and it will tell you to see that person but  
14 that person is long gone.

15 Q. Which is the public, kind of?

16 A. Right.

17 Q. Okay. Thank you so much for that.

18 One more thing. You mention after you performed this work  
19 for this 82 percent gas in the air which you found, you conducted  
20 -- sir, I'm going back to the turn-on now. I'm sorry.

21 (Indiscernible) on the turn-on. After the turn-on was completed,  
22 you stated you did a leak survey of the tested area.

23 A. Um-hum.

24 Q. Do you have a procedure that require you to do that or is it  
25 what you just talked about?

1 A. No. We're supposed to -- any time -- you talking about after  
2 you turn it on?

3 Q. Yes.

4 A. We do initial check of the buildup and everything.

5 Q. Correct.

6 A. You take your --

7 Q. And other meters.

8 A. Yes. You have -- just because I turn this meter on, I still  
9 have to check along -- if it's like 10 meters, because I turn one  
10 on, I have to check all 10.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. Because it could be a leak on another one.

13 Q. Yes.

14 A. So when you turn gas on, you have to do a leak check. That's  
15 just not for that one meter. That's for all of them.

16 Q. Okay. Is there a procedure or just a practice?

17 A. That is what we have to do. That's a procedure. That is  
18 what we are told to do. That's part of our job. It's not like  
19 because I have the job, I'm going to take it upon myself. No.  
20 This is a procedure the gas company train us to follow.

21 MR. EMEABA: Thank you so much. That's what I have.

22 BY MR. AMROLIWALA:

23 Q. This is Rashmikant Amroliwala. This is concerning 9/27/2012,  
24 8701, and Apartment Number 201. When you went there for gas turn  
25 on and the regular ranges and all the appliances, at the same time



1 did you check the regulator vent whether it's leaking, weeping or  
2 maybe the missing of screen on anything?

3 A. Yeah. We have to check the whole -- everything. As far as  
4 the vent, when we do that outside building test, you locate the  
5 vent and you test that. We have to check to make sure the screen  
6 is still there. If it's like a riser buildup, we have to check  
7 that. We use bar test holes. We even have to check if we see  
8 like where the water might come in, we check -- we put bar test  
9 holes down to check that also.

10 Q. What machine you use for to check the leaks?

11 A. The Ranger or a Rover. A CGI machine that has a actual  
12 number read.

13 Q. Do you use the Gas-Trac or the CGI?

14 A. You mean a Sensit?

15 Q. Yeah, for testing.

16 A. I take it with me but I don't rely on that because that's not  
17 giving me a number reading. With the Sensit, anything of a strong  
18 chemical smell can set it off. I mean we use it, but we also use  
19 a number CGI machine.

20 Q. CGI machine.

21 A. And soap.

22 Q. That's perfect. So you use --

23 A. I use the Rover and mainly the Ranger, but I take the Sensit  
24 in because sometimes the Sensit, not having that long arm, you can  
25 reach up high.

1 Q. How often you calibrate your machine?

2 A. We have to do it every month.

3 Q. Okay. That's -- the second question: From 9/5/2013, that's  
4 8703 Arliss Street. Here is when you went there you got 82  
5 percent gas outside the building --

6 A. Um-hum.

7 Q. -- 6 feet from the building wall.

8 A. Right.

9 Q. What grade of leak you consider that leak?

10 A. That's what we call a code 1, priority 1.

11 Q. Grade 1.

12 A. Grade 1.

13 Q. And what are the requirements for grade 1 leak? What do you  
14 do?

15 A. A grade 1 leak can consist of anything 10 feet or closer to  
16 the wall, that's a grade 1. If we have a bar test hole that's --  
17 it could be in the street -- 75 percent or more, that's a code 1.

18 Q. But the grade 1 leak, did you made it safe right away or what  
19 did you do?

20 A. Once I found that I had 82 percent gas readings, I checked  
21 along the wall. I even went inside and checked to make sure no  
22 readings were inside the building. After that, I called my  
23 dispatcher and told them that I would need a crew truck to come  
24 address.

25 Q. Did you wait there until the dispatch people --

1 A. We have to stand onsite --

2 Q. -- (indiscernible) --

3 A. We have to stand onsite until the next crew show up. We  
4 cannot leave. Once we call it in, we can't leave. We have to  
5 wait until another crew -- until a crew shows up.

6 Q. Let's go to 2/1/2013, 8703, Apartment 104. This is the  
7 inside, you found the leak on 1-inch union. How did you fix the  
8 leak?

9 A. When a union was leaking, you take two wrenches -- first I  
10 soaped it up, used the machine, found out where the leak was. And  
11 with a union it's a compression-type fitting. Put a wrench on and  
12 you tighten it. After I tightened it, I re-soaked it and used the  
13 machine. Got no leak indications. After I found that, you soap  
14 or test the rest of the buildup just to make sure that it's  
15 nothing else, and that's it.

16 Q. When you got the complaint for the leak in this Building  
17 8703, that's a gas leak inside the building --

18 A. Um-hum.

19 Q. -- how do you go inside the building when the -- when you  
20 receive this kind of call? How you go inside the building?

21 A. How do I go inside? I'm not understanding.

22 Q. Well, what I mean that, when you get the leak call, you have  
23 a machine, the CGI, the Gas-Trac, everything. So you go with the  
24 tools and equipment inside the building or you just go and look  
25 for the leak and come back?

1 A. No, you carry your machines in. You carry your machines  
2 already turned on before you enter.

3 Q. That's what I wanted to hear from you. So you just turn the  
4 machine on and then go inside.

5 A. You turn them on --

6 Q. Yeah, that's the procedure --

7 A. -- outside.

8 Q. Yeah, that's the procedure that needs to be followed that  
9 when you go inside turn on the machine.

10 A. Right.

11 MR. AMROLIWALA: Okay, as far as I know, that's my questions,  
12 sir. Okay.

13 BY MR. PRICE:

14 Q. Mr. White, in the three visits that you were there --

15 A. Um-hum.

16 Q. -- do you recall any interaction with the management company?

17 A. I know the leak that I had the 82 percent, I had a  
18 maintenance guy, was a Spanish guy because he assisted me in  
19 getting inside. But as far as the other ones, I'm not sure. I  
20 can't recall. But I know on the outside leak that it was a  
21 maintenance guy from the actual building --

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. -- that assisted me. And the other two, I can't recall.

24 Q. So on the one where you can recall, and you said that he  
25 assisted you in getting inside --

1 A. That's as far as like where the meters are and stuff like  
2 that. Because I don't have a key. So they will open it up and  
3 allow us to check inside, walk through the hallways just to make  
4 sure we're not getting a gas reading, and that's it.

5 Q. So you have a specific recollection that that meter room was  
6 locked?

7 A. I can't remember. But I know it was a maintenance guy, he  
8 came and -- because he kept talking to me. He was like, yeah,  
9 somebody complained about they smelled gas. I said, well, I got a  
10 crew coming. And he stood there for a minute, but then he left.  
11 And I know 711 pulled up, and I told them exactly what I had, and  
12 I let them know that I had went inside, I checked, got -- didn't  
13 get any readings, and I told them I had a 82 percent here, and I  
14 told them I checked around the building wall, no other leaks.  
15 It's just right here that where I'm getting it at. And from that  
16 point, they took over, and I left because I have other jobs that  
17 I had.

18 Q. So I won't belabor it, but you have a memory that you needed  
19 that maintenance man to help you get into the meter room?

20 A. Yeah. Because when I came, I saw him, and he had said  
21 something about somebody smelled gas. I told him, I said, well,  
22 I'm getting readings here, but I got to check inside. And he went  
23 and walked with me while I was doing my checks, and I remember  
24 that.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. But I can't on the other. I can't remember if somebody  
2 assisted me with that one. But I remember this one because I knew  
3 it was a leak that was close with a high reading that was too  
4 close to the building.

5 Q. Okay. Aside from the maintenance company, do you recall any  
6 interaction with any of the residents in any of these three calls?  
7 Anything that stands out?

8 A. No, I can't, I can't remember that.

9 Q. Okay.

10 MS. GUNARATNAM: I have a few.

11 BY MS. GUNARATNAM:

12 Q. So going back to 2012 in 8701, when you went to turn on the  
13 meter for that apartment. Kind of along what Steve was asking  
14 about, do you remember how you got into the basement there?

15 A. Somebody probably had to let me in, but I can't actually  
16 remember that one.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. The leak, that was more of a threat. So when you're doing  
19 this type of job, all jobs are important, but those leaks, you  
20 remember them.

21 Q. Okay. Do you remember the room itself and if there are any  
22 appliances in that basement, 8701?

23 A. I can't remember that. Because I know sometimes we'll have a  
24 meter room and it will have like a house water tank. But I can't  
25 recall if that one had one.

1 Q. Right. Okay. That's fine. Do you -- when you said you  
2 check all the meters normally, do you -- not just the one you  
3 turned on but all the meters around, yeah.

4 A. You just go around and use your machine just to make sure  
5 you're not picking up any readings.

6 Q. Right. Do you check the appliances in the room as well?  
7 Like if there's a laundry nearby or water heater in that same  
8 room?

9 A. If it's any appliances in there, we check everything.

10 Q. Okay. In addition to the meters?

11 A. Addition to the meters. If it's a laundry room where you can  
12 get to, you check that.

13 Q. Okay. Have you ever had to do any maintenance work on --  
14 near the regulators, the pipes around the regulators or anything  
15 like that in your history of work as a tech?

16 A. What, at that particular location or just in general?

17 Q. Or in general.

18 A. Sometimes you will get a leak on a fitting and you have to  
19 fix it. If it's on the buildup that I have to take care of, I  
20 have to fix it. If I can't fix it, we have to call somebody to  
21 address the issue. It's not like if I find a leak inside that  
22 room and I say, well, I'll just put in a order for somebody to  
23 come out later. It has to be fixed right then because that's a  
24 code 1 leak. You have a leak inside a building --

25 Q. Right.

1 A. -- it has to be fixed, whether I can do it or somebody else.

2 Q. Do you recall work specifically on a regulator itself? Have  
3 you ever had to change out a regulator?

4 A. No. That would be a totally different department, which is  
5 the rough-in department. I'm not -- we're not able to. If  
6 something was wrong with the regulator, we would turn the gas off  
7 -- due to a supervisor's approval, depending on how bad the  
8 situation is, we turn it off and make it safe. Then another crew  
9 would come and address that issue.

10 Q. Okay. What crew is that?

11 A. A lot of times, if it's apartment buildings with buildups  
12 like that, it would be they call it rough-in.

13 Q. Rough end crew?

14 A. Rough-in crew, yeah.

15 MS. GUNARATNAM: Okay.

16 MR. CHHATRE: Okay.

17 BY MR. CHHATRE:

18 Q. Real quick follow-up questions. The one that you said you  
19 went in the meter and tightened I guess --

20 A. The union.

21 Q. Union.

22 A. Um-hum.

23 Q. As you enter, did you hear any noise or just odor?

24 A. No. It was --

25 Q. Small leak.



1 A. -- a small leak.

2 Q. Small leak.

3 A. But it was able to be picked up by the soap and the machine.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. A lot of times -- now if you hear it blowing, that means  
6 somebody is going to actually smell it.

7 Q. Right.

8 A. So you'll -- but a lot of times you get a small leak, you  
9 might not can smell it as good, but it's there.

10 Q. Okay. Now when you go for any call, do you ever call the  
11 building manager or somebody that, hey, look, I'm from Washington  
12 Gas, I need to go into this building or I'm just here fixing  
13 something? Do you have to do that to manager or?

14 A. You let them know that you are onsite. A lot of times they  
15 look for you. So you let them know you're here. And they, if  
16 they have to send a maintenance person to let you in or whatever  
17 they'll do that. Or if you see a maintenance personnel, you just  
18 say, I got a call about this, you know, gas, and they'll assist  
19 you.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. But a lot of times you do, you let the leasing office know so  
22 you won't have it where you might do the work and they don't know  
23 and they thinking you never showed up.

24 Q. Oh, I see. Okay. So that in your procedure you have to go  
25 and knock on the door of the office manager, whoever the person

1 is.

2 A. Yeah. A lot of times it will say -- in the body of the order  
3 it will say see -- go to leasing officer or see the maintenance  
4 guy or it will kind of direct you to who you need to see.  
5 Sometimes you get it where it says see a customer. They don't  
6 always be there.

7 MR. CHHATRE: That's all I have.

8 Couple of follow-up, Kelly, if you have any?

9 BY MR. EMEABA:

10 Q. I have just a quick question. Were you or did you respond to  
11 this accident on the day of the accident? Did you respond  
12 to --

13 A. To the actual when it blew up?

14 Q. Yes.

15 A. No. I was out of town. I was on vacation.

16 MR. EMEABA: Thank you. That's all.

17 MR. CHHATRE: Anything?

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No.

19 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. If not, off the record.

20 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: THE EXPLOSION OF APARTMENT  
BUILDING 8701 OF FLOWER BRANCH  
APARTMENTS IN SILVER SPRING,  
MARYLAND ON AUGUST 10, 2016  
Interview of Chester White

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA16FP003

PLACE: Chillum, Maryland

DATE: August 19, 2016

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.

---

Katherine Motley  
Transcriber