

**Interview of Charles Mathis – 8/23/00**

Charles R. Mathis

2-16-01

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Witness: Charles R. Mathis, Administrator, Pipeline Control Operations Control Department, El Paso Natural Gas Company

Time and Date of Interview: 3:00 PM August 23, 2000

Location: El Paso Natural Gas Company Corporate Offices, 100 N. Stanton St., El Paso, Texas

Investigators: Eric Sager

Accident: El Paso Natural Gas Company Pipeline Rupture and Fire that Occurred Near Carlsbad, New Mexico (August 19, 2000)

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Mr. Mathis was interviewed in his office at 100 N. Stanton St. at El Paso Natural Gas corporate headquarters. Pipeline control room personnel, training, and scheduling were discussed.

He said that each shift of controllers and coordinators are scheduled together as a team of three and work together for about a year at a time. All persons are rotated among the shifts so that in theory, everyone works with everyone else, to gain the benefit of the others' background and knowledge. *over time, CM*

Mr. Mathis stated that most of the controllers and coordinators are selected from El Paso field employees. He said that all but three of the coordinators are from the field and these three persons were dispatchers. He said they were dispatchers during the days of manually keeping track of products schedules and deliveries; and it was before El Paso's pipeline control became centralized and automated. *CM originally hired as*

"New hires" for controllers receive one month minimum of work with seasoned controllers who have either "senior" or "systems" ranks. He identified the training process as relative to controller ranks. For example, systems controllers can train senior and entry controllers, and senior controllers can train entry controllers. He stated that coordinators can train any level of controller or can train another coordinator.

Mr. Mathis said that ~~after entry controllers have completed the minimum month of working with seasoned controllers, they are assigned to a regular shift to work on their own.~~ Each entry controller must have their work performance evaluated and approved by "anyone who worked with them." The evaluation process is overseen by Mr. Wilcox and Mr. Mathis, and both supervisors

*CM* the senior persons who conducted their training.

*During initial training, an entry level controller shadows seasoned controllers, learning the operations on both the North and South desks. After a minimum of one month, he is assigned to a regular shift.*

question the trainers about the entry controller's performance. Mr. Mathis recalled several questions he asks such as: "is the controller trainee having trouble with anything, how comfortable is the controller trainee, [and] is he hesitant moving around the screens." He said that controller trainees' evaluations include the two-page EPNG Pipeline Control Task Verification List. He noted that there have been no "washouts" and attributed this to the success of their controller selection procedures. He indicated that knowledge of field operations gained directly from job experience is important for assuring proficient controller performance.

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Mr. Mathis was asked to characterize the quality of work by the two controllers and coordinator working in the control center at the time of the pipeline rupture. He indicated that the controller working at the south system console is a highly rated employee at the center. He is dependable as well as technically competent, and he is personally "well fitted" for the job. He said that the controller working at the north system console is also a highly rated employee who is technically able and has performed well in emergency situations. For example, Mr. Mathis said the north system controller was useful in handling the Dumas line, pipeline rupture. Mr. Mathis said that the coordinator working on the shift when the present rupture occurred is the newest of the center coordinators. Mr. Mathis described him as technically knowledgeable and an important contributor to the center's operations. Mr. Mathis said the coordinator had been demoted to controller for several months because of changes in the organization of control center staff. He was reassigned as a coordinator and has remained continuously in that position since.

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End Digest