U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
In the Matter of LOUISIANA ENERGY SERVICES, LP
Docket No. 70-3103-ML Official Exhibit No. 63
OFFERED by: Applicant/Licensee Intervenor NIRS/PC
NRC Staff Other
IDENTIFIED on _____ Witness/Panel A. Makhijani
Action Taken: ADMITTED
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From: Brice Smith [brice@ieer.org]
Sent: Friday, January 28, 2005 10:09 AM
To: Lindsay Lovejoy
Subject: Washington Post Article

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washingtonpost.com

Thousands Can't Return Home After Toxic Train Wreck in S.C.

Chlorine Spill Leaves Nine Dead, Town of 5,400 Evacuated

By Darryl Fears and Sara Kehaulani Goo
Washington Post Staff Writers
Monday, January 10, 2005; Page A03

AIKEN, S.C., Jan. 9 -- Thousands of evacuees were marooned in this college town Sunday, lounging on twin beds in tiny motels for a fourth day, not knowing when they can return home to nearby Graniteville because the train cars that derailed early Thursday, choking their town with chlorine gas, had not been moved.

A tanker carrying 16,000 gallons of sodium hydroxide was temporarily covered with a lead patch, and chlorine from other tankers was transferred into containers, said Robin Chapman, a spokesman for Norfolk Southern Railroad Co. Contractors planned to lift the damaged railcars onto trucks Monday to be hauled away, and Chapman said residents may be able to start returning home on Wednesday.

That would not be too soon for Cindy Lewis, 43, who was curled on a bed at the Econo Lodge in Aiken, where she has lived for two days with daughter Missy, 23, and Missy's three children. "My dog is in the front yard," Lewis said. "I don't know if she's dead or alive."

Apparently alive but perhaps in the pound. Lt. Michael Frank, a spokesman for the Aiken County Sheriff's Department said Sunday night that 100 pets were recovered and returned to their owners -- except for two taken to an animal shelter. He said there were no reports of dead animals.

Missy Lewis said the wreck was the worst thing to have happened in Graniteville in as long as anyone could remember. Nine people died from the toxic fumes, and at least 33 of the estimated 250 injured remained hospitalized. About 5,400 people, nearly the entire town, were evacuated, authorities said. The dozen who refused to leave were kept outside the evacuation zone, within a mile radius of the derailment.

Norfolk Southern officials were trying to determine how much toxic gas leaked from the cars and how much diesel fuel spilled from the locomotive, said Thom Berry, a spokesman for the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. He said some toxic material apparently leaked down a storm drain and caused a major fish kill in Horse Creek. He said the number of fish deaths had not been determined. Eighty local, state and federal agencies have converged on Aiken to work on the spill, Berry said.

National Transportation Safety Board investigators said the engineer of the freight train with the chlorine and sodium hydroxide cars applied the emergency brakes 17 seconds before impact with railcars parked on a siding. Safety investigators learned the information after recovering the locomotive's event recorder and downloading its contents Sunday.

Like a plane's "black box," the event recorder stores data from the last 45 minutes of operation. Investigators said they hoped to also learn how fast the Norfolk Southern train was traveling before impact with the parked railcars. The speed limit in the area was 45 mph, safety board spokesman Keith Holloway said.

Safety board officials said they took photos and collected documents with information from the locomotive's cab, such as the manifest of each car and the engineer's instructions for moving through areas without signals, such as Graniteville. Like the displaced residents, investigators may not have full access to the site for several days. They are waiting for environmental officials to declare it safe.

Investigators also interviewed crew members who adjusted the rail switch a few hours before the crash. The move aligned the rail off the main tracks and to a side rail, where other railcars were parked. The train that derailed was the first to cross the track after the switch had been moved, officials said.

That seemed to suggest that the track crew had forgotten to adjust the switch back to the main track, but safety board officials said it was too soon to draw any conclusions.

"We are going to investigate everything. We're looking at what the crew was doing, looking at what their responsibilities are. We are looking at their training, their work schedules and rest schedules," said safety board member Deborah Hersman. "We don't do any analysis and don't speculate about the cause, but really we're here to gather facts. We're not here to assign blame."

Cindy and Missy Lewis live on Graniteville's Sams Street in what authorities are calling the "hot zone." Police urged people in the area to evacuate but in their door-to-door patrol missed the Lewis house. Although she could not detect any toxic gas at the time, Cindy Lewis said she smelled trouble and wanted to leave with her neighbors.

"It's a big mess," Lewis said. "I wanted to go, but we stayed there the first night because we couldn't get out. Yeah, I was scared. We had no money to get out. We had to borrow money to have a place to stay the next day."

On Saturday, she left the Comfort Suites, where she had stayed for a night, and went to First Presbyterian Church of Aiken, where Norfolk Southern was handing out checks to evacuees. Cindy got $300 and Missy received $1,000, because of her children. A family friend, Idelle Lucas, 44, said she was given $600.

The company could be handing out more checks if it is found liable for the wreck. Cindy Lewis complained of chest pains resulting from stress after the crash. Lucas said she has sores around her mouth.

"I blame the railroad," Lucas said, as Lewis and her daughter nodded in agreement.

Goo reported from Washington.

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