UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

In the Matter of:

IE TMI INVESTIGATION INTERVIEW

of Thomas Van Witbeck
Manager of Operating Plant Services
Energy, Inc.

Trailer #203
NRC Investigation Site
TMI Nuclear Power Plant
Middletown, Pennsylvania

May 17, 1979
(Date of Interview)

July 9, 1979
(Date Transcript Typed)

207
(Tape Number(s))

NRC PERSONNEL:
Bob Marsh
Dorwin R. Hunter
William H. Behrle (Met Ed)
Tim Martin

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MARSH: Today's date is May 17, 1979. The time is 1:18 p.m., and we are located in Trailer 203 at the TMI site. My name is Bob Marsh. I am an investigator with the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, assigned to the Region III office in Chicago, Illinois. We are at the TMI site today to conduct an interview on Mr. Thomas Van Witbeck, and at this time I would like the other people in the room to introduce themselves, spell their last name, and indicate their employment position. You can start now.

HUNTER: My name is Dorwin R. Hunter. I am an inspector specialist, Performance Appraisal Branch.

VANWITBECK: My name is Tom Van Witbeck. I am a manager of operating plant services with Energy, Inc.

BEHRLE: My name is William H. Behrle and I am a project engineer with Metropolitan Edison Company.

MARTIN: My name is Tim Martin. I am a reactor inspection specialist with the Performance Appraisal Branch.

HUNTER: Mr. Van Witbeck before we began here we had a few words before I began the tape addressing Mr. Page's memo which you had an opportunity to read and I will provide you with a copy of this memo before you depart today. As we indicated, the memo covers the purpose of this investigation and some of the goals we hope to achieve as well as the authority under

which it is being conducted. In addition there are several questions asked and at this time I would like to put those questions on tape and make them a matter of record on tape as well as on the printed form. The first question reads, do you understand the above making reference to the two-page memo?

VANWITBECK: Yes.

HUNTER: The second question reads, do we have your permission to tape this interview?

VANWITBECK: Yes.

HUNTER: And third, do you want a copy of the tape?

VANWITBECK: Yes.

HUNTER: Okay, what I will do is at the conclusion of this interview, I will duplicate it and provide you a copy of the tape at that time and as a copy of the transcript becomes available, you will also be provided a copy of the written transcript. There is a fourth question not specifically called out at the end of the letter, but covered in the body of it which addresses your right, if you so choose to exercise it, to have a representative from Metropolitan Edison present or a union member if you are an employee of that class. Can I ask would you like a company representative present?

VANWITBECK: Yes, I would.

HUNTER: Okay, I will indicate at this time that William Burley, Project Engineer with Med Ed is present in the room and is in that capacity. Mr. Van Witbeck to begin with if you would could you give us a brief resume of your education, your work experience, your position with Energy, Inc., and how that addresses the TMI incident?

VANWITBECK: My background starts, in the nuclear business, in seven years in the Navy, nuclear Navy. I was an engineering and lab tech and an instructor at prototype, four years of college, and bachelor's degree in nuclear engineering, and nine years industrial experience, in startup and operating plant services, since. Currently, I manage a start up and operating plant services group for Energy, Inc. As to the TMI involvement, we were brought in by DeCamp to assist the client in identification of the sequence of events and evaluation of data and the assessment of the accident.

HUNTER: Okay about Energy, Inc., could you provide me the address of the home offices?

VANWITBECK: Yes, It is P.O. Box 736, Idaho Falls, Idaho, and zip is 83401.

HUNTER: Okay, and one other item. I'd like to cover is the nature of your relationship with Med Ed in the TMI incident. Was this brought about by a recent contract or business agreement or has this been in existence prior to the date of the incident?

VANWITBECK: This particular involvement came about after the incident. Prior to the incident we have been involved with GPU through the Epri Retran users group.

HUNTER: All right, one other point I'd like to make is that we address acronyms or jargon could we define as we go along to assist the girls who have to transcribe this?

VANWITBECK: Sure. The GPU being General Public Utilities, RETRAN being a computer code, thermal hydrulics computer code.

HUNTER: Okay, at that point then I'll turn it over to Tom Martin to begin the questioning.

MARTIN: It's Tim Martin, Tom. My interest at this point is in any information you might have relative to loss of data in the computer system. As a result of possible operator action or otherwise. Can you provide us with any information in this area?

VANWITBECK: There was approximately an hour and half worth of data lost from the alarm printer. This information was lost because the alarm printer went out, was out of service and the printer was transferred over to the print, the alarm print function was transferred over to the utility typewriter and in transferring back to the alarm printer after a new typewriter was installed, the data was lost during that transition. As to whether or

not it was operator action or a component misfailure, you know a failure of a component, we don't know at this time. We do know that it is missing and it is well documented in sequence as you go down through the alarm typewriter that it skips about an hour and a half worth of data. I have got the exact times here if you want that.

MARTIN: Tom, In earlier discussions you had informal discussions with, I think, Mr. Jim Creswell and you indicated that some data may have been lost in the computer when NRC inspectors were interfacing with the computer. Do you have any knowledge of this? If so, can you provide us with the specifics?

VANWITBECK: There was a lot of data being taken on the day of the incident and this is all third party inforamtion by the way. I wasn't in the control room at that time. NRC investigators were calling things up on the typewriter trending data, and in the process of this trending of the data, and accumulating this data, other data, the data they were interested in was removed, and the other data was dumped. You know the paper was thrown away. Some of it was data that some other people had been trending. The data sheets, we have very few data sheets from these trends. They seemed to have been removed or after they were used and the information taken from them, they were discarded. Something was done with them. They did not get into the filing system at Med Ed.

MARTIN: Tom, can you give an approximate time that this occurred, and ...

VANWITBECK: I think what I am referring to is conversations I have had with the people from the plant and from those conversations it would be in the first day and a half to two days where this was occurring.

MARTIN: Would this occur on the first day of the event or ...

VANWITBECK: Yes. First and second days.

MARTIN: Do you know what people were involved in calling this data and possibly misplacing it?

VANWITBECK: No, I don't know the names of the individuals. I do know the, that it was the, there was data being trended by both NRC and by the plant people and in the taking of this data from the computer tape, you know from the computer printout and removing it to other work locations in the plant (the control room) that this information never got back in the files.

MARTIN: Tom, So what we are saying is that if the data within the computer was not disturbed, but in its printed form the portions of this printed form were removed to other work locations and have not been located since.

VANWITBECK: True. And this isn't with reference to the hour and a half that was missing. That data was just lost in the computer, the alarm data, and we are talking about other trending data information people had called up on the computer. To my knowledge none of the alarm printer data was missing because of people removing it.

MARTIN: All right Tom, can you identify the information that was specifically lost or must we refer to it in general terms?

VANWITBECK: I, the only, I do know there were some thermocouples in it and thermocouples being called up, but that is the extent of the knowledge right now. I do know they were calling up more than that and you know using it, but as to what that data was I don't know at this time.

MARTIN: Tom, to your knowledge is this data critical for the analysis of the event?

VANWITBECK: It would be hard to say whether or not it is critical because I don't know what it is. It may or may not be. The thermocouple information would be significant as the plant here does not have a routine thermocouple map as you would have on a Westinghouse plant, and these are called up on an individual basis.

MARTIN: Tom, the information that we are talking about was it isolated to a single printer or typewriter system? If so, what types of things would be printed on that typer that would be of interest to the investigation of sequence?

VANWITBECK: The information that would be printed on that typer would be, it would be on a utility typer. It was the one that they were using at that time. As to its value in the sequence, it probably wouldn't specify

information as to when something occurred, that is a pump start and that type of thing. What it would provide is amplifying information as to the condition of the plant. Whatever parameter was called up would be another data point on that parameter. It may or may not be recorded elsewhere at that time.

MARTIN: So basically this probably involved data that was called up because of a specific interest of the individual would not have been available normally unless someone else had called it up, and, therefore, it did not disturb the computer system specifically just because these activities were going on.

VANWITBECK: It wouldn't have disturbed the computer system, however, that you know you can say the time being used to call up this was interrupting trends that other people were doing on the machine. Each individual calling up certain information would be wanting that information trended or printed out and that would interrupt and reduce the total availability of the computer to other users or at least that typer. I forgot the first part of your question, excuse me.

MARTIN: Tom, let me go ahead. I think you've provided the information needed there. You indicated that this information you had was third party.

VANWITBECK: That is correct.

MARTIN: Which means that for me trace back and find out exactly what information we are talking about, I am going to need to talk to those people. Can you give me the names of those people that might have first hand knowledge of these activities?

VANWITBECK: Some would be several of the operators in the control room at the time. I could have I would have to go back and look at my records. I don't have them with me. I do know that Ivan Porter who is an INC engineer, was one of the people that was using the typewriter at the time trending some information.

MARSH: Okay. I would like to request that data that you do have available in your home records that I would have access to it.

VANWITBECK: Sure, right.

MARSH: Any names that you can recall or trace back that would have specific first hand information I'd like to have access to it.

VANWITBECK: Fine.

MARTIN: Okay. I just have one question the data that was missing would include thermocouple data, has Med Ed or you done, have you done a trace in the document trailer for that data?

VANWITBECK: Oh, yes.

MARTIN: It wasn't able, you weren't able to locate it?

VANWITBECK: No. The information that was being trended and as to what was being called up would probably be best be gotten from the people who were doing it at the time that were calling the trend. The value of that information would be you know best gotten from them as to what they were trending and what they were looking at. It was my impression this information was being relayed to people offsite that were attempting to get a handle on the situation. Therefore, I would assume that it was of value.

MARTIN: Has any attempt been made to trace this data to these people since obviously you had first hand or you've been informed that this was where the data is?

VANWITBECK: Several requests have been made to NRC to provide all information they had. The trending data that the other people were trending in the control room, we have gone back through all the waste material we could find in the control room. This was three days later though, 3 to 5 days later, and that in that type of time frame. We could not find it and we went through all the boxes, the desks, the drawers, cabinets. One of the things the operators at this plant do is when they are taking data like that they tear off the sheets and pardon me, they get the information that they want, and then those sheets that are torn out are put into the back of

the computer. There is a cabinet behind it. We pulled out the information that was in there. There were some 25 or 30 sheets though. It wasn't anything like we have had coming out of there at that time.

MARTIN: Tom, let me understand you then. Are you indicating that you can't determine how many sheets are missing or which sheets are missing?

VANWITBECK: There is not at this time any way to determine that because it is off of a typewriter or a printer that doesn't run the, you know is not running in a routine sequence. It has been interrupted to provide this information. And as to the extent and the amount of information, no one, I can't. All we know is, it was taken and it is not currently in our files, and we have made a search of the control room for it. And have asked the operators and people to, you know anybody that was in there, to bring out of their files or in their files in the plant any information they had.

MARTIN: You indicate that there is no way to determine how many sheets are gone. You know that some tear sheets were inserted in the back and you indicated there were approximately 50 you found there.

VANWITBECK: Twenty-five or thirty.

MARTIN: All right 25 or 30. How do you know that does not cover all the sheets that were actually typed?

VANWITBECK: In the volume of paper that goes through that machine was in continuous use and that would be more than that for that period of time over those several days. Plus, there were no thermocouple data in there.

MARSH: For the sake of an understanding of the system here, could you briefly describe the system as we are addressing it what the input devices are, or what the output is? Are you working off a buffer or strictly addressing the computer straight? What's the nature of the printing devices? Are they IBM Selectrics or are they other devices? Are you using single paper or manifold paper? Could you cover that briefly for us?

VANWITBECK: Okay. The computer system, I am not totally familiar with the whole system because you know this is not a plant that I have worked on in the past. The paper we are using is a standard single sheet computer paper. The printers are IBM Selectric typewriters. The input devices are most of the plant parameters that are brought into the computer, and there are some single point, there are quite a few single point parameters that can be called up on a code number point number and put on trend or called up for single readings. There are also some trend blocks that can be called up, and as to the content of all the trend blocks available, I don't know how all of those trend blocks that are available.

MARSH: Okay. If I am understanding what you are saying earlier correctly, I am looking at the possibility of laymen or other investigative teams downstream listening to this tape that may not understand the intricacies

of it, but are you saying that as this computer is calling these single point pickups or taking information from those sources and is then asked to provide a printout that that interrupts that input of information?

VANWITBECK: It could interrupt a trend that was in process at the time, yes. Or it will queue these and print them out from the queue.

MARSH: All right, so as it is going through the process of queuing information and preparing to feed it into the printer it no longer accepts inputs or is that it still gets inputs but we just delay the actual printout of that information.

VANWITBECK: The printout, I don't believe you will lose the printout information. It is just a matter of an interrupt and then coming back. Now you can and I don't know the hierarchy of commands, but there are certain commands that will come on and you could by setting up the correct trend rate, block out any printout, but I don't know that that was going on. As far as somebody calling up a given point and putting it on trend to the extent that it would block out other inputs or if it the trend points they were looking at were of, let's say the trend commands were in the hierarchy such that they would blank out anything else.

MARSH: The process of calling out a dump of particular information, would this automatically wipe out the memory of information that was requested or is that it just that it dumps and still maintains a fixed memory of that info?

VANWITBECK: I do not know. Whether as to the memory of this machine for all single points, but based on the machine to my limited knowledge of it, I don't believe that the information would be stored in the memory. There is a 12-hour dump, but I don't know what goes into it totally.

MARSH: Okay, but there is a 12-hour?

VANWITBECK: Yes, but I don't know what it, I just learned this a couple of days ago here and I don't know the extent of the content of that storage.

MARSH: Okay. What type of a dump is that? Is it just a general erase or is it dumped out in a Mag tape or Mag card or is--?

VANWITBECK: No, I don't think it is dumped on Mag tape and I really don't know, but I immagine it is dumped out to this, through the Selectrics.

MARSH: So there might still be a possibility that the total memory was dumped at a 12-hour period later and could possibly still be located? What I'm after is information that was lost, lost forever or might we regain it from a later dump.

VANWITBECK: No, I don't think there was a later dump of that type of information made for that machine and I am not sure what the capacity is of the machine and as to whether or not it just fills up the buffer and then starts pushing the information out the back side of the buffer.

MARSH: That is all I have, thank you.

VANWITBECK: Okay.

MARSH: It appears that we are at the end. Okay, no one else indicates they have any questions. Tom, at this point I'd like to open it up to you. We have asked you a few questions. If there is any statement you would like to make or make a matter of record, I'd like to turn the microphone over to you at this time for your comments.

VANWITBECK: Well, I guess I would ask the question that several requests have been made to the NRC and are you aware of the status of any of these requests that is the information that it was believed to be, have been in NRC investigators' hands and the reps onsite at the time.

MARSH: Okay. To the best of my knowledge, we had no investigators onsite during the event itself. You had more operational people who were addressing the operational conditions that were going on. Any requests put to them, no, I am not privy of any at this time.

VANWITBECK: Umhum.

MARSH: And I speak that in a personal sense.

VANWITBECK: Yeah. I understand.

MARSH: Our investigation as far as I know has not turned up any specific requests.

VANWITBECK: Okay. That is the only question I had.

MARSH: Anything else? Okay, then the time being 1:40 p.m. and I am reading 410 on the meter. I would like to say thank you for your time recognizing you have a busy schedule and have an aircraft to catch. Just say thank you for your your input for showing up here.

VANWITBECK: Well, thank you.