

Norfolk Southern offers pittance to cover East Palestine, Ohio residents' hotel costs

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Do you work at Norfolk Southern or another Class I railway? Do you live in East Palestine or a neighboring community? Tell us what you know about the Norfolk Southern disaster by filling out the form at the bottom of this article. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

In the aftermath of the East Palestine, Ohio derailment and toxic spill, Norfolk Southern has offered to relocate some of the residents who live within a mile of the wreckage for at most two months while they clean the site. The move is a fig leaf which will do nothing to alleviate the long-term effects of the disaster on residents, the health effects of which will linger for years.

In a statement and email sent to residents, Norfolk Southern says that they would pay for people to live in hotels or rented homes during the one to one-and-a-half months that they say it will take them to clean up the site of the derailment.

Residents of East Palestine and surrounding areas have developed symptoms of severe headaches, burning eyes, lips and throat, dizziness and other symptoms that are all in line with chemical poisoning.

The statement did not say that the \$55 billion company would reimburse the many residents who were unable to return to their homes over the past month because of their poisoning by Norfolk Southern.

The company will also not pay for housing for those who happen to live more than one mile from the site, even though the toxins released on the community have traveled miles by air, water and through the ground. Many people, some as far away as East Liverpool, where Beaver Creek flows into the Ohio River, have suffered the same symptoms.

“A one mile radius for relocation doesn't reflect the facts on the ground that this chemical disaster has had a

far reaching impact. We need to stop letting Norfolk Southern put their profits ahead of the people of our community,” East Palestine resident and River Valley Organizing organizer Jami Cozza told WFMJ news.

A Carnegie Mellon University study found that Acrolein levels “ranged from 5x lower to 3x higher in East Palestine on February 20, 2023 than those in downtown Pittsburgh.”

Acrolein is a product of the burning of vinyl chloride. Some of the highest levels were detected several miles east of the derailment, as far east as the CMU study went. Hazmat data sheets for Acrolein warn that “exposure to Acrolein can cause dizziness, lightheadedness, nausea, headache, and passing out.”

Norfolk Southern and the EPA are also not making plans to evacuate the East Palestine School campus which sits well within the one mile radius. Many students have become violently ill while in school and forced to leave because of the reaction to the chemicals.

The WWSWS spoke with East Palestine resident Eric Coza, whose son attends the high school.

“My kids came home from school the other day with red eyes, my wife has skin irritation. When they went to the hospital, they said that this was from chemicals. Is this school here safe?

“My son called me personally because the school said that nobody could go to the nurse's office 10 minutes before [or] after class. They [Norfolk Southern] don't even want to pay for air purifiers to put in the school, or in people's homes.”

Norfolk Southern and the EPA announced a plan last Thursday to clean the ground near the wreckage, with no provisions to guard against the release of vinyl chloride into the air. Vinyl chloride boils at just 8 degrees Fahrenheit (-13 C), but will remain in ground and water for a long time if undisturbed. When the

ground is shifted and exposed to air, or if water is sprayed from hoses or used in households, the gas can escape into the air very easily.

Capturing the gas can be done by tenting the site and vacuuming off the gas as it is released. Instead, the gas has been allowed to escape into the atmosphere, thereby continuing to sicken residents.

The EPA and Norfolk Southern plan also calls for the incineration of the soil at the nearby incinerator in East Liverpool, Ohio. Experts say incineration of this waste is especially dangerous because dioxins and PFAS, which have not yet been tested for, either do not incinerate easily or cannot be incinerated. This could have the effect of releasing these chemicals from the ground into the air.

Dioxins are highly cancerous and dangerous to humans at just one part per billion. PFAS are also highly toxic, and are often referred to as “forever chemicals” because they don't break down very easily if at all.

Norfolk Southern also started “cleaning” Leslie Run and other area waterways in a process known as aeration. This is done by disturbing the creek bed, which releases vinyl chloride from within the sediment, and then spraying the water through fire hoses into the air, allowing the vinyl chloride to evaporate.

Standing in the city park near where the aeration was taking place, hydrology expert Bob Bowcock said, “I would say the remediation response from the state and the federal government has been less than expected and less than standard.”

Referring to the claim by Norfolk Southern and the EPA that they were vacuuming off the gas from the water, he said “You know, I don’t know how [they’re] vacuuming it off, because the aeration — I can see the water right there.”

Bowcock said that instead of spraying the water into the air, it is standard practice to do the spaying inside tank cars, where the gas accumulates on the top and can be captured and vacuumed off.

“The cleanup is not being done properly,” Eric Coza said. “The creeks are grossly contaminated but they don't want to block anything off.”

“They don’t have red tape [at the site] or anything. My son is 15 years old, and I can't stop them from playing in the park. But they shouldn't be opened with all the chemical spraying over there in the creeks or

how they're agitating the sediment in the bottom of the creeks. This is just putting the vinyl chloride into the air.”



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