Trace compounds of vinyl chloride found in East Palestine, Ohio residents after derailment and chemical spill

Samuel Davidson
11 April 2023

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.

Following the catastrophic train derailment and chemical spill in early February, several East Palestine, Ohio residents have tested positive for traces of vinyl chloride in their bodies.

Linda Murphy told Pittsburgh based WTAE that test results show the byproducts of vinyl chloride in her body and that she is now consulting with specialists about the issue. Linda and her husband Russell live about a mile from the crash site. She and her husband have been using a portable water tank for their drinking water since the crash, but the very volatile substance can also enter the body through the air.

"I know there's risks of liver cancers," she said. "I know there's risks of brain cancers. I know there's central nervous system disorders that come along with this," she told WTAE.

Urinalysis, the station reported, found 600 micrograms of chemicals that formed after the vinyl chloride metabolized.

Vinyl chloride is a highly toxic chemical used in the making of PVC plastic pipes and other plastic materials. It is a known carcinogen, causing cancer of liver, brain and other organs.

On February 3, a Norfolk Southern train carrying five carloads of vinyl chloride along with other toxic and hazardous material derailed in East Palestine, Ohio. Thirty-eight cars in all derailed, including 11 that were carrying hazardous materials.

Several cars caught fire, and two days later Norfolk Southern and government officials conducted what they described as a "controlled burn," in which the five rail cars carrying 1.1 million pounds of vinyl chloride were emptied onto the ground and then set on fire.

The flames from the explosion shot up hundreds of feet and could be seen from 20 miles away. Smoke from the flames carried toxins throughout the area.

Norfolk Southern, the government and officials with the Environmental Protection Agency have all claimed that the air and water is safe. Yet, hundreds of residents of East Palestine and the surrounding area have complained of suffering from burning eyes, throat and skin and felt nauseous at times.

Late last month, seven members of a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) team that went to East Palestine to document the health concerns of residents, became sick themselves and had to leave the area until their symptoms disappeared.

A local veterinarian told the *World Socialist Web Site* that she is frustrated because they have not been given any information on what to expect or how to treat farm animals and pets who have been poisoned.

"People are bringing their animals to us, but we have no information to tell them or ourselves know what should be done," she said.

Last month, Norfolk Southern began cleaning the ground and water near the derailment. The company said that they would cover living expenses for residents who lived near the site. However, residents have reported that they faced many obstacles and harassment when they sought to get reimbursed for hotels and other expenses.

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Truck carrying 40,000 pounds of contaminated soil overturns

On Monday, a truck carrying 40,000 pounds of contaminated soil from the cleanup site overturned, dumping about half of its load onto the road. The tractor-trailer swerved off the road, running into a ditch and hitting a utility pole before turning onto its side. The 74-year-old driver suffered injuries from the crash and has been cited for operating a vehicle without reasonable control.

The accident underscores the continued problem with cleaning up the site, which consists of millions of pounds of contaminated ground and water. Contaminated water is being taken to injection wells, usually depleted natural gas or oil wells, in which the water is pumped and stored underground.

Initially many cities and states with hazardous material dumps had refused to accept contaminated soil and ground from the crash after protests from local residents to themselves being poisoned.

However, in a pointed letter from the EPA, which warned local officials that they could not turn away the materials and threatened them with prosecution for interfering with interstate commerce, the shipments of the waste products had resumed, although the final destinations are no longer being made public.

Every year tens of millions of pounds of highly toxic chemicals are produced and used in various industrial processes throughout the country.

There are 667 sites that are licensed to treat, store and dispose of hazardous wastes in the United States. Most of these are located on industrial sites where the waste is produced. Two hundred fifty-two are commercial facilities, licensed to receive materials from offsite customers.

While in most cases they are no longer just a trench in the ground which is then backfilled with dirt, the sites are still very hazardous as containment ponds have overflowed or linings meant to keep pollutants out of the ground have deteriorated and ripped.

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