

Homes evacuated following CSX train derailment near Philadelphia

Kevin Reed
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Residents were evacuated from their homes in Whitmarsh Township, Pennsylvania early Monday morning following a nearby CSX train derailment.

Company officials said 16 of 40 cars derailed on Norfolk Southern tracks, including one carrying hazardous tetrachloroethylene, at approximately 4:50 a.m. in an area of Montgomery County that is 14 miles from downtown Philadelphia.

A CSX statement said, “There is no indication of any leaks or spills of hazardous materials and there are no injuries to the crew of the train.” Norfolk Southern also released a statement saying, “There is no risk to the public.”

Hazmat crews were called to the scene before police announced that there was no threat to the public, since the car carrying the tetrachloroethylene, an industrial chemical used in dry cleaning, was located intact.

Crews from both railroad companies were on site to begin cleanup efforts. CSX spokesperson Sherrie Bowman told news media that the cause of the derailment appeared to be a sinkhole stemming from weather-related issues.

One resident who was evacuated told CBS News Philadelphia that being told to leave her home at the crack of dawn was “alarming.” The woman, who was evacuated along with her daughter, said, “It all happened really fast. We all don't have shoes on.”

She added that she did not realize how serious the situation was until seeing all the lights, helicopters and fire trucks in the neighborhood. “Right as you hear the door at 5:30 in the morning,” she said, “it's a little shocking. And yeah, it was just scary. First thought for me always goes to my family and friends.”

The CBS News report said officials reported that some silicone pellets were found leaking from the cars, “but they don't pose any danger to the public.” Other

news reports said that five of the cars contained urea, a liquid fertilizer that is hazardous if it comes into prolonged contact with skin.

Once the evacuation order was lifted, by 9:00 a.m. Monday morning, railroad officials and local law enforcement made it clear that the number one priority was getting the trains running again. Speaking of the railroad corporations, Christopher Ward, chief of the Whitmarsh Police Department, said, “It is their intention, due to the commerce on this line, to try to have the line back up and running, I think the last check was by Wednesday evening.”

The Whitmarsh Township derailment comes a little more than five months after the disastrous train crash in East Palestine, Ohio on February 3, in which 50 cars derailed, 20 of which contained hazardous material, including vinyl chloride. A decision was made by railroad officials to set the cars containing vinyl chloride on fire three days after the train wreck, claiming it was done to prevent an explosion.

However, the “controlled release and burn” lasted for two days, contaminated the soil and ground water, and resulted in the release into the air of a massive chemical cloud of hydrogen chloride and phosgene, which hung over the area and poisoned the local population. A subsequent investigation by the federal government determined that the intentional burning was unnecessary, since there was no danger of an explosion.

As suspected by many residents of East Palestine, the burning of five derailed cars by Norfolk Southern was the fastest way to clear the accident site, reopen the tracks and restart the trains. No one has been held accountable for this disaster.

Demonstrating his subservience to the railroad industry, Democratic Pennsylvania Governor Josh

Shapiro expressed no concerns whatsoever about the veracity of the claims from CSX and Norfolk Southern, the fourth and fifth largest rail companies in the US, that everything was just fine after the derailment. Shapiro said he was “monitoring the situation.”

According to data maintained by the Federal Railway Administration (FRA), there are an average of three train derailments each day across the US, due to the crumbling rail infrastructure and to the railroad conglomerates’ policy of placing profits over the health and safety of their employees and the residents of the communities through which the trains run.

According to a study of federal rail incident reports by *USA Today*, there have been over 5,000 accidents involving hazardous materials spilling or leaking from trains that were either in transit or sitting in a rail yard. The data also shows 149 incidents of hazardous materials released from moving trains.

In 2022, the rail companies reported 330 spills or leaks of hazardous materials, six of which caused injury to people. The actual number of spills and leaks is likely much higher, and their severity much worse, given the fact that the FRA relies on self-reporting by the railroad corporations.



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