

Three Norfolk Southern trains crash near Philadelphia, as CEO receives huge pay raise

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The World Socialist Web Site invites railroad workers with information about this accident or information about unsafe working conditions in general to contact us by filling out the form below. All information will be kept anonymous.

Three Norfolk Southern trains collided and derailed Saturday morning along the Lehigh River in Eastern Pennsylvania, spilling diesel fuel and plastic pellets into the river.

The accident occurred when an eastbound Norfolk Southern train collided with a parked train on the same track. A third train, traveling westbound on a parallel track, then plowed into the wreckage.

The accident occurred in Lower Saucon Township county near the Pennsylvania-New Jersey State border. Lower Saucon is about 45 miles north of downtown Philadelphia.

Photos posted by the Nancy Run Fire Company show dozens of railcars scattered along the tracks and the banks of the river. Clearly seen in the photos are at least two tanker cars, one of which appears to be partially overturned.

Other photos show two locomotives off the tracks, with at least one partially submerged in the river.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is investigating the accident and expects to have a preliminary report in about a month.

NTSB spokesperson Sarah Taylor Sulick said in a statement, "Preliminary information indicates that an eastbound NS train struck a stopped NS train on the same track." She continued, "The wreckage from the striking train spilled onto an adjacent track and was struck by a westbound NS train. The collision led to the derailment of an unknown number of cars."

Gary Weiland, who lives across the river in Bethlehem Township, told the Allentown *Morning Call* he initially heard what sounded like a crash, then a period of quiet followed by the sound of another crash.

"As the second one was happening, I went upstairs and looked out the window and saw a splash. I said to my wife, 'I think a train derailed,'" he said.

The collision is the latest in an unending series of rail accidents in the United States, which averages around three derailments per day. It also comes a little more than a year after the disastrous derailment of a Norfolk Southern train in East Palestine, Ohio. Thirty-eight rail cars, including 11 carrying

toxic chemicals, derailed poisoning the small town of 5,000 people and the surrounding communities.

More than a year after that disaster, residents continue to report severe health problems and the long-term effects are unknown. Last month, President Biden briefly visited the town for the first time. Speaking before a select crowd, to avoid the possibility of protests, he sought to whitewash the government's role in the disaster. "There is a lot more to do, although the vast majority has been done," he blandly declared.

As in East Palestine, Norfolk Southern was quick to claim that there was no threat to the public.

In a post on X, Norfolk Southern added "There is no threat to the public, no hazardous material concerns from the railcars, and no reports of injuries to our crew members." But the railroad then contradicted itself by implying that fuel had leaked into the Lehigh River, writing, the diesel fuel spill "has been contained with booms and will be vacuumed out."

Norfolk Southern made many similar statements to the residents of East Palestine that were quickly exposed as lies. They were told that it was safe to return to their homes, which had been heavily contaminated with vinyl chloride and other toxic and carcinogenic chemicals.

In fact, booms floating on water can only contain a portion of the spilled fuel, much of which would have already moved downstream before they were even deployed. The Lehigh River is running especially fast this time of year, having been swelled with winter run-off and recent strong rains.

Any spill could potentially impact millions of people. The 109-mile Lehigh River passes by the small industrial cities of Bethlehem and Allentown before emptying into the Delaware River, which flows past the cities of Philadelphia and Wilmington, Delaware before emptying into the Delaware Bay.

The brightly colored plastic pellets are often consumed by fish, not only poisoning them but also making their way into the food chain.

Norfolk Southern CEO receives pay raise

Not a single person has been held criminally responsible for the East Palestine disaster, and both state and federal authorities have been fully complicit in an ongoing cover-up. Indeed, CEO Alan Shaw, who was defiant in his refusal to accept even figleaf regulations in a series of Senate hearings last year, was given a 37 percent boost in pay last year, according to recent reports.

Shaw received \$13.4 million in total compensation in 2023, including base salary, stock options, pensions and health and other benefits. His base salary rose \$200,000, to \$1.1 million, and his stock option awards rose by \$2.2 million to \$10 million.

However, Shaw is also facing a proxy fight by a group of investors led by the Ohio-based Ancora Holding Group, which own about \$1 billion of the company's stock. Ancora is calling for the removal of Shaw and has advanced its own slate of candidates for the Norfolk Southern board of directors.

The group is blaming Shaw for its handling of the East Palestine derailment, which, according to the company, has now cost it \$1.1 billion.

Ancora's claim to be concerned about the East Palestine disaster has nothing to do with the safety and health of East Palestine residents and railroad workers. In fact, Ancora's concern is that the mismanagement of the company is cutting into profits and delaying even deeper cuts to staffing levels.

Significantly, the railroad unions have leaped to the defense of this corporate criminal. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen said that it will side with Shaw and will "vigorously oppose" Ancora's attempt to gain control of the Norfolk Southern board and oust Shaw and Chief Operating Officer Paul Duncan.

Shaw's record is clear, slashing the workforce to the bone, which makes disasters such as East Palestine and that which occurred last weekend inevitable. This includes cuts to maintenance crews and train inspections before they leave the yard, either of which could have prevented the East Palestine derailment.

However, these cuts are being carried out across the entire industry, as the railroads seek to maximize shareholder value for their huge Wall Street investors.

The fact that the engineer's union is siding with Shaw once again demonstrates that the unions work not in the interest of the railroad workers but in collaboration with management against the interests of workers.

Unanswered questions in Lehigh River derailment

Many questions remain unanswered in Saturday's derailment and these details may not be uncovered in the NTSB investigation or report. These include:

First: Was the eastbound engineer warned of the parked train

on the same track? If he was, why didn't he have time to stop the train? The same question can be asked about whether the westbound train engineer was warned about the crash ahead of it.

Second: What were the lengths of the two trains involved in the collision? Norfolk Southern and the other Class 1 rail carriers have been increasing the lengths of their trains to transport larger and larger amounts of cargo with smaller crews. This is inherently unsafe because the longer and heavier trains take longer to stop.

Norfolk Southern, along with the other four Class 1 rail carriers, has resisted installing advanced signaling and automatic braking devices along the railroads. These technologies would have both warned the train crew and then automatically stopped the trains in time to prevent a crash.

Norfolk Southern also does not use electronic braking systems, instead continuing to use the 150-year-old air brake technology, which takes over two minutes or up to two miles for the brakes signal to travel the length of the train, let alone for braking to begin.

However, while balking at spending on such elementary safety systems, the railroads have pointed to the implementation of Positive Train Control and other automated technologies to justify slashing rail crews. The industry has fought for years to cut crew sizes from two—with only an engineer and conductor on trains running over two miles in length in some cases—to one.

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