

Chemical tank leak forces evacuation in Toledo, closure of schools and workplaces

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A release of the toxic chemical glycidyl methacrylate (GMA) late Tuesday night from a 5,500-gallon tank at the MC Tank Transport terminal in North Toledo, Ohio, forced nearly 1,000 residents from their homes and led to a shelter-in-place order affecting tens of thousands of people.

Schools on both sides of the Ohio-Michigan border closed Wednesday, including Toledo Public Schools and Bedford Public Schools in Michigan. Stellantis evacuated the north plant of its Toledo Jeep complex, which employs more than 4,000 workers, Tuesday night and canceled both shifts Wednesday. Kuka, Mobis, Mayco and Dana canceled afternoon shifts.

The city ordered everyone within one mile of the terminal to evacuate at 10:48 p.m. Tuesday. At 4:24 a.m. Wednesday, it ordered everyone within three miles to shelter in place, an order covering more than 50,000 people. Dense fog blanketed the city that night, slowing the emergency response. Meteorologists said a temperature inversion and calm winds likely kept the chemical cloud close to the ground.

The shelter-in-place order was lifted at 5 p.m. Wednesday, less than 13 hours after it was issued, and the evacuation zone was cut to a half mile. On Thursday morning it was cut again, to a quarter mile, and Toledo schools reopened.

The tank had not stopped leaking. A city spokesperson said Thursday morning that the chemical “continues to release from a compromised tank but has significantly slowed.” HAZMAT crews entered the site for the first time that afternoon. A full assessment of the tank and those beside it had yet to be done, and the city said its goal was “to transition site control back to the owner for cleanup.”

At Ottawa River Elementary, outside the evacuation zone, students reported headaches and a chemical smell

in the hallways Thursday. Toledo Public Schools offered parents a “voluntary early dismissal” as “a precautionary measure.”

It is not clear what methodology was used by city officials to determine that it was safe for residents to return home and send children back to schools in the area. Many residents expressed skepticism of official assurances. These concerns recall the aftermath of the East Palestine, Ohio derailment, where federal agencies used similar technology to declare areas safe.

Area hospitals treated 57 people for burning eyes and throats, coughing, headaches and nausea, and seven were still being treated Thursday. Travis Williams, who lives nearby, said he “woke up choking” on the fumes. “I am definitely worried about the long-term effect of this,” he said.

Accounts on what happened differ. According to the *New York Times*, an explosion may have triggered the first release. “An additional explosion also remained a possibility because the leaking chemical tank was next to others,” Toledo Mayor Wade Kapszukiewicz said. The Ohio EPA said the chemical came from the tank “because of an error that occurred when the material was being transferred.”

Steven Sucheck, chair of the Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry at the University of Toledo, told 13abc, the local ABC affiliate, “You should be concerned, because it is a hazardous chemical. It does have toxicity associated with it. It can cause skin irritation, eye irritation.” He added, “You wouldn’t want to be exposed to this long term, of course, since it is a probable carcinogen.”

Asked about the lack of sensors that can measure the chemical, Sucheck said, “If you don’t have actual data on how much is out there in the air, you’re a little bit blind in that regard.” A local meteorologist reported an

Air Quality Index reading of 828 Wednesday morning at a station four miles from the site, higher than during the worst of the Canadian wildfire smoke this summer. But the index does not measure glycidyl methacrylate.

A mother living within the three-mile zone criticized the city on Facebook for reopening schools Thursday, before the release had been stopped. “How is it okay to send our kids back after ONE day?! My daughter’s school is 1.5 miles away. The first night we felt like we were trapped. ... Burning eyes, throat, nausea. I still have a lingering headache and sore throat.”

Another replied: “Like many other families, making it paycheck to paycheck, they didn’t leave right away. ... people’s health, families of everyday people are getting the short end of the stick.”

This is the second serious incident involving dangerous chemicals in Toledo since the August explosion at Brent Industries, an industrial dry-cleaning and laundry facility that killed two workers, Heladio G. Perez, 46, and Mary Allen, 64. In the wake of the explosion and fire, residents who live near the site reported symptoms including coughing and wheezing, headaches and sore throats, as well as concerns about air quality.

In May, a tank holding some 7,000 gallons of methyl methacrylate at GKN Aerospace in Garden Grove, California, overheated and cracked, forcing more than 50,000 people from their homes for five days.

MC Tank Transport was bought last year by Kenan Advantage Group (KAG), which calls itself North America’s largest tank truck carrier. KAG has faced multiple federal workplace safety investigations and enforcement actions in recent years.

In February 2020, at a KAG terminal in Cleveland, Ashley Friedman, 30, entered an oxygen-deficient tanker that had been purged with nitrogen for cleaning and was overcome. Her co-worker Alan Linder, 60, collapsed trying to rescue her. Both died. OSHA cited KAG for serious violations related to confined-space operations, protective equipment and chemical hazard communication, resulting in a \$33,735 settled penalty.

These disasters take place as the Environmental Protection Agency, the supposed watchdog of public safety, is being gutted and restaffed with the very people it was created to regulate. As the WSWS documented in November 2025, the agency’s leadership is now drawn directly from the chemical and

petroleum industries.

The disaster in Toledo is part of a broader assault on the limited health and safety protections workers won in past struggles. Chemicals that can cause cancer are moved and stored beside working-class neighborhoods by companies whose first concern is cost.

The decision on when it is safe to go home, return to school or go back to work is made by officials who, within two days, were preparing to hand the site back to the company. Workers need their own organizations to monitor conditions and enforce safety: rank-and-file committees in every workplace and neighborhood, with the power to stop production when lives are at risk. That fight is bound up with placing industry under public ownership and the democratic control of the working class, so that production is organized to meet human need rather than private profit



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