

FEBRUARY 17, 2023

# FACT SHEET: Biden-Harris Administration Deploys Additional Federal Resources to East Palestine, Ohio

The Biden-Harris Administration has mobilized a robust, multi-agency effort to support the people of East Palestine, Ohio.

Within hours of the Norfolk Southern train derailment, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) deployed a team to East Palestine to support state and local emergency and environmental response efforts. The Department of Transportation (DOT) also arrived on scene to investigate what led to the derailment. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has been closely coordinating with the emergency operations center, Ohio Emergency Management Agency, and Federal partners.

As President Biden told Ohio Governor Mike DeWine and Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro soon after the derailment, the Federal Government stands ready to provide any additional federal assistance the states may need. Today, in response to Governor DeWine's and the Ohio congressional delegation's request on February 16 for additional federal public health support, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced they are deploying a team of medical personnel and toxicologists to conduct public health testing and assessments. The team will support Federal, state, and local officials already on the ground to evaluate individuals who were exposed or potentially exposed to chemicals and help ensure timely communications to the public.

The Biden-Harris Administration is committed to supporting the people of East Palestine every step of the way, and holding Norfolk Southern accountable. Each Federal agency is playing its unique role in this task, including:

## **Environmental Protection Agency**

EPA personnel arrived on site before dawn on February 4 to support state and local officials who are leading the emergency response efforts. There are dozens of EPA personnel on the ground, including multiple EPA on-scene coordinators, agency scientists, and regional teams, that are tasked with:

- **Monitoring Air Quality.** The EPA is continuously monitoring air quality using state-of-art equipment. The EPA has also deployed mobile detection equipment and stationary equipment for detection of a wide range of compounds, including volatile organic compounds (VOCs), phosgene and hydrogen chloride.
- **Screening Homes for Contaminants.** The EPA has assisted with the indoor air monitoring of 500 homes under a voluntary screening program offered to residents, and no detections of vinyl chloride or hydrogen chloride were identified above levels of concern. EPA is continuing to offer screening to residents within the evacuation zone.
- **Securing Norfolk Southern Commitment to Cover Clean Up Costs.** On February 10, the EPA issued a letter to Norfolk Southern requiring the railroad to document the release of hazardous contaminants. The letter also outlines cleanup actions at the site and EPA's authority under the law to hold them accountable.
- **Holding Norfolk Southern Accountable for Clean Up.** The EPA is coordinating the oversight of Norfolk Southern's soil remediation of the derailment site. The remediation includes testing of the soils within and immediately surrounding the impacted areas. Results of the testing are evaluated by EPA and OH EPA to determine a strategy to ensure the site is cleaned up to meet federal and state regulations.
- **Helping Ensure Water is Safe to Drink.** EPA is assisting state and local agencies to test surface and ground water to ensure drinking water is safe. This includes surface water testing to monitor downstream impacts on the Ohio River.

## **National Transportation Safety Board and Department of Transportation**

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the U.S. and significant accidents in other modes of transportation—including railroad, highway, marine, and pipelines, and Department of Transportation arrived on site within hours of the derailment. The NTSB is leading the investigation into the cause of the derailment with Department of Transportation personnel supporting. Once the investigation is complete, the Federal Government will use all available and appropriate authorities to further ensure accountability and improve rail safety. Ongoing actions include:

- **Investigating the Cause of the Derailment.** The National Transportation Safety Board has been on site since within hours of the derailment to determine what caused the derailment. NTSB plans to submit preliminary findings report within weeks, and a final report that will lay out what caused the derailment. The Federal Railroad Administration

(FRA) and the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) within DOT are also on site supporting the NTSB's investigation.

- **Ensuring Compliance with Rail Safety Regulations.** FRA is working to determine Norfolk Southern's compliance with rail safety regulations. When DOT gets the results from the NTSB investigation about the cause of the derailment, as well as the analysis from the FRA on rail safety compliance, DOT will take actions as needed that ensure accountability and improve safety.
- **Creating a safer rail system.** DOT is working on numerous fronts to improve rail safety, including managing over \$4 billion in discretionary grant programs designed to improve rail safety and eliminate at-grade rail crossings. DOT also provides training and resources for local first responders who deal with hazardous materials incidents. DOT is also working on rulemakings to improve rail safety including proposing a rule that would require a minimum of a two-person train crew size for safety reasons, a major priority for rail workers. DOT conducts research to improve the design of rail cars that carry hazardous materials. DOT is also developing a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking that will require railroads to provide real-time information on the contents of tank cars to authorized emergency response officials responding to or investigating an incident involving the transportation of hazardous materials by rail.

## **Department of Health and Human Services and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

In response to Governor DeWine's request on February 16 for additional federal public health support, HHS and the CDC are deploying a team of medical personnel and toxicologists to conduct public health testing and assessments. The team will include a medical toxicologist and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) Region 5 lead to support EPA and state health department efforts. ATSDR protects communities from harmful health effects related to exposure to natural and man-made hazardous substances and will send a team to interview people in the derailment area and conduct an Assessment of Chemical Exposure investigation.

Since the derailment, HHS has been providing technical assistance to state and Federal partners on emergency response, emergency management, and scientific assessments of chemicals including risk communication. This has included participating in daily state-led emergency coordination calls to provide expert advice and analysis.

## **Federal Emergency Management Agency**

FEMA is in constant contact with the emergency operations center in East Palestine, as well as the Ohio Emergency Management Agency and Federal partners. EPA has secured Norfolk Southern's commitment to cover all cleanup costs.

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