Unites States Environmental Protection Agency

Office of the Inspector General

Washington, D.C. USA

c/o: OIG.PublicAffairs@epa.gov

September 25, 2026

Hello,

I am writing in response to the August 28, 2026 announcement by Vice President Vance and Administrator Zeldin requesting an independent OIG investigation into the response to the February 2023 East Palestine train derailment (https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/us-vice-president-jd-vance-us-epa-administrator-lee-zeldin-request-independent). I am providing information from my own direct involvement that I hope will be useful to your review.

I am a professor at Purdue University. In 2023, my research team and I responded to the disaster and worked directly with many affected households and business owners. We also interacted with local, state, and federal officials, throughout the first year. We provided technical assistance to many groups, and we still maintain communication with many of those households and business owners today. We were not paid by local, state, or federal agencies involved in the response. During this period I also interacted with then-Senator Vance's office, USEPA Region 5, Ohio EPA, Governor DeWine's office, the CDC, the White House, and other researchers working on the response.

Over the course of my team's involvement, I documented specific, recurring problems with the response in contemporaneous letters and testimony to federal, state, and local officials. A few examples:

1. Worker safety (March 2, 2023): I wrote to OSHA after observing cleanup workers at Sulfur Run and Leslie Run with no respirators, wading through and standing beside heavily contaminated creek water, and working near aeration units without being told what chemicals they were being exposed to. Independent air monitoring by Texas A&M and Carnegie Mellon had already identified at least nine chemicals present at the site. The OSHA Director called me after they visited East Palestine.
2. School building decontamination (March 27, 2023): I wrote to the superintendents of East Palestine High School and Elementary School after learning the schools had not yet been professionally cleaned by EPA-designated contractors, despite faculty reporting

health impacts and observed particulate matter inside the buildings following the derailment.

3. Drinking water testing and reporting (April 12, 2023): I wrote to then-EPA Administrator Michael Regan after reviewing a Stantec/Norfolk Southern lab report sent to a household that was unreadable to a layperson — over 200 chemicals listed in cramped tables, 29 compounds where the detection limit was higher than the cited regulatory standard (meaning those chemicals could not actually be ruled out as present), no stated basis for the standards used, and no QA/QC data provided. I advised that household to use bottled water given the inadequacy of the results they had been given.
4. Ongoing indoor contamination (June 17, 2023): During my sixth field investigation, I found buildings near the derailment site and along Sulfur Run still carrying the characteristic odor of chemical contamination, with occupant-funded indoor air testing showing butyl acrylate above ATSDR screening levels along with soot and other chemicals. Some occupants reported being unable to stay inside their buildings more than a few minutes without symptoms, and some said Norfolk Southern refused to assist because of pending legal action.
5. USEPA staff explicitly approved CTEH's use of handheld air testing devices incapable of finding the serious health hazards in the buildings, instead of requiring chemical screening which is recommended after other disasters.

I have full copies of these letters, my Pennsylvania legislative testimony, my public comments to House and Senate committees, community meeting materials, and related CDC/FOIA correspondence from the response period, which I would be glad to provide in full. [Public links are below]

For context on my background: I have responded to a number of major disasters and emergencies, including the 2014 MCHM chemical spill in West Virginia (at the request of Governor Tomblin), the 2018 Camp Fire in Paradise, California, the 2021 Marshall Fire in Colorado, a 2021 jet fuel spill in Hawaii (at the request of the U.S. Navy), and the 2025 Palisades/Eaton Fire in California. From 2002–2005 I also worked as a civilian engineer for the U.S. Army on infrastructure security for garrisons and deployed units. Across this range of incidents, I have seen firsthand how difficult it is to make sound decisions under uncertainty. Measured against that experience, the decision-making I observed in the East Palestine response was the most troubling I have encountered in my career. This clearly allowed for community members, business owners, CDC, and cleanup workers to become sick. I also provided feedback to the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine effort on East Palestine lessons learned, among other activities.

Frankly, many of the chemical exposure and cascading impacts were all preventable. I can attest that many of the officials involved in decision making, based on my interactions with them, did not have the expertise and experience needed. This is something I have encountered across disasters in my career. This is why my team works to create evidence-based guidance for making public health and safety decisions under extreme circumstances.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions. My sincere hope is that a thorough, fact-based review leads to changes that prevent a response that causes harm from happening again.

Regards,

Andrew

For the investigation I am providing the following information:

1. Peer-Reviewed Studies Describing the Incident, Response, Decisions, and Household/Business Owner Experiences funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation

- 2024, Environmental and private property contamination following the Norfolk Southern chemical spill and chemical fires in Ohio. Authored by: Coelho et al. Led by Prof. A. Whelton, Purdue University. https://doi.org/10.1039/d4ew00456f
- 2024, Rapid screening of volatile chemicals in surface water samples from the East Palestine, Ohio chemical disaster site with proton transfer reaction mass spectrometry. Authored by: Jiang et al. Led by Professor N. Jung, Purdue University. *Science of the Total Environment*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2024.176056
- 2024, Natural Attenuation Potential of Vinyl Chloride and Butyl Acrylate Released in the East Palestine, Ohio Train Derailment Accident. Authored by: Chen et al. Led by Prof. F. Loeffler, University of Tennessee Knoxville. *Environmental Science and Technology.* https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.est.4c04198
- 2024, What drives household protection actions in an industrial crisis? Insights from the East Palestine Train Derailment. Authored by: Toland et al. Led by Prof. L. Spearing, Tufts University. *Sustainable Cities and Society.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2024.105867
- 2025, Understanding household water insecurity after an industrial crisis. Authored by: Toland et al. Led by Prof. L. Spearing, Tufts University. *Infrastructure and Sustainability.* https://doi.org/10.1088/2634-4505/adffe3

Please note that the U.S. National Science Foundation as the only federal agency to provide funds for a rapid response. Other federal agencies took many months to provide their funding to outside parties. The U.S. National Science Foundation RAPID research program is an exceptional vehicle for helping people and businesses get access to frontier level technical support.

2. Public Website Listing Result Presentations, Along with Letters, and Requests, https://engineering.purdue.edu/PlumbingSafety/project/OH-chemical-spill

- United Council Community Meeting, October 2023
- Letter to the Ohio Congressional delegation identifying remaining health risks and recommended actions, June 2023
- Testimony to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Senate Democratic Policy Committee hearing, May 19, 2023
- Letter to the USEPA Administrator asking for water testing oversight, April 12, 2023
- Purdue University Community Update on Scientific Investigation - RVO/UEP Meeting, April 2, 2023
- FOIA request reply by the U.S. CDC about potential March 2023 employee illness, March 27, 2023
- FOIA response to the U.S. CDC about potential March 2023 employee illness, March 28, 2023
- FOIA request to the U.S. CDC about potential March 2023 employee illness, March 27, 2023
- Letter to Superintendents of East Palestine High School and Elementary School about building decontamination, March 27, 2023
- Public comment, U.S. House of Rep. Subcommittee on Env., Manufacturing, and Critical Materials for the hearing, March 21, 2023
- Letter to Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro about information provided to county, state, and federal agencies, March 20, 2023
- Testimony to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Senate Veterans and Emergency Preparedness Committee hearing, March 20, 2023
- Purdue University Community Update on Scientific Investigation in East Palestine, OH, March 12, 2023

- Public comment submitted to the U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee for the hearing, March 8, 2023
- Letter to the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) asking for a worker safety investigation, March 2, 2023

3. Public Website Listing Presentations,
https://engineering.purdue.edu/PlumbingSafety/resources/presentations

- Environmental Operators Certification Program, September 2023
- Virtual Symposium Community Update, August 2023
- Indiana Water Resources Association Symposium, June 2023
- University of California Irvine Seminar, April 2023
- Community Update on Scientific Investigation in East Palestine, OH, March 12, 2023