

U.S. Department of Labor
OSHA
200 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20210

March 2, 2023

Dear Director Parker:

It is my professional recommendation that OSHA deploy worker safety teams to evaluate the past and ongoing exposure to cleanup workers in East Palestine, Ohio. I have been involved in disaster response actions to the Elk River spill in 2014, multiple wildfires, and most recently I deployed a team to East Palestine to conduct testing. During this recent deployment, we discovered that the creeks (Sulfur Run and Lesley Run) were heavily contaminated with chemicals, something that was not widely shared with the public prior to our visit. We collected samples from these creeks and observed workers in the following conditions:

- No respirators
- Wading through the creeks
- Standing in and beside the creeks
- Standing by makeshift aeration units and being directly exposed to the emitted chemicals
- Sliding off the Sulfur Run creek bank and into the heavily contaminated water (he remained upright)

In particular, the actions taken by the workers, in an effort to volatilize the chemicals into air are causing exposures that do not appear to be guarded against by worker safety. I also asked some workers if they had been advised about PPE, and they said they were not told what chemicals they were being exposed to.

Independent air monitoring conducted by Texas A&M University and Carnegie Mellon University indicated that at least nine chemicals were present. As you know, exposures at certain concentrations can pose short- and long-term health impacts to workers. Given this information it would be prudent to consider worker and air monitoring at sites conducting creek aeration, not limited to Sulfur Run and Lesley Run, and soil cleanup operations.

Additional information related to these concerns include:

- March 1, [EPA director advises East Palestine children to stay out of creeks, streams amid Ohio train derailment fallout | Fox News](#)
- March 2, [Rail unions say workers have fallen ill at derailment site \(nbcnews.com\)](#)
- Separately, on March 2, the [Ohio EPA](#) website warned that the waterways contained “grossly contaminated water and sediments”.

Separately, I have heard from several journalists who visited the area saying that they had multiple days long headaches and throat irritation after leaving East Palestine. It is important that any workers working in East Palestine are properly advised about the chemical exposure risks and are protected. Please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached at awhelton@purdue.edu.

I am providing information in an individual capacity, expressing my own views; and are not representing the views of Purdue University, their College or their Department.

Sincerely,



Andrew Whelton