

CDC Officers Became Sick While Assessing Contamination in East Palestine

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The reports add "confirmation that the symptoms reported by East Palestine residents are real and are associated with environmental exposures from the derailment and chemical fire," said one scientist.

Reports that several investigators with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention became ill earlier this month when they visited East Palestine, Ohio offered the latest evidence on Friday that the air and water in the town is less safe than state officials and rail company Norfolk Southern have claimed, following the company's train derailment in February.

As [CNN reported](#), seven physicians and officers from the CDC's Epidemic Intelligence Service traveled to East Palestine in early March, a month after a train carrying toxic chemicals including vinyl chloride derailed there.

The team reported developing symptoms including headaches, sore throats, coughing, and nausea while they were conducting their door-to-door assessment of public health risks.

The symptoms were similar to those reported by many [East Palestine residents](#) since the crash, and are consistent with the physical effects of exposure to vinyl chloride when it is burned, as it was by officials who conducted a controlled release following the derailment to avoid an explosion.

Despite reports from people in the area, who were briefly evacuated and then told just days after the accident that it was safe to return to East Palestine, state officials and Norfolk Southern representatives have insisted that no dangerous levels of contamination have been detected in air or water.

“We must stop playing Russian Roulette with our health and the environment,” said environmental justice advocate Erin Brockovich Friday.

It just ain't worth it people.
We must stop playing Russian Roulette with our health and the environment.
<https://t.co/Pxx2vpnodp>

— Erin Brockovich (@ErinBrockovich) [March 31, 2023](#)

The report from CDC experts “adds confirmation that the symptoms reported by East Palestine residents are real and are associated with environmental exposures from the derailment and chemical fire,” David Michaels, an epidemiologist and professor at the George Washington University School of Public Health and former head of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, told *CNN*.

Norfolk Southern has removed roughly [nine million gallons](#) of contaminated wastewater from the site of the derailment so far. Chemicals spilled into local creeks and rivers after the derailment and eventually flowed into the Ohio River.

Residents have expressed frustration over officials’ assurances as many have reported symptoms similar to those experienced by the CDC experts.

“They’re all scientists,” one East Palestine woman named Jami Cozza [told](#) a panel of state and federal experts at a town hall on March 2. “They’re sitting up here telling us nothing’s wrong. I want you to tell me why everybody in my community is getting sick.”

The CDC told *CNN* that the Epidemic Intelligence Service team’s symptoms have not persisted since they left East Palestine.

Purdue University engineering professor Andrew Whelton, who has conducted independent studies in East Palestine since the derailment, said on social media this week that he submitted a Freedom of Information Act request to the CDC, asking for documents regarding the investigators’ illnesses.

This weekend, I submitted a [#FOIA](#) to the CDC requesting docs related to their team's chemical exposure illnesses and being pulled out of [#EastPalestine](#) [#Ohio](#) on March 7.

If true, why have other government employees, contractors, and the public have yet to be notified? <pic.twitter.com/P0dkTCyvt1>

— Andrew Whelton 🇺🇸 (@TheWheltonGroup) [March 28, 2023](#)

“I think it is important for not only government officials to communicate with each other,” Whelton told *CNN*, “but also to communicate their experiences with the public, so that everybody can understand what’s going on, and how help needs to be brought to East Palestine and the surrounding areas.”

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Julia Conley is a staff writer for Common Dreams.

Featured image: Contractors removing the burnt wagons, East Palestine, Ohio. (Facebook via [Free West Media](#))

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