

Operation Home Safely FAQ Sheet

Taggart Road Incident – East Palestine, OH

General Information Regarding the Incident

Just before 9:00 PM on February 3, 2023, a train derailed in East Palestine, Ohio on Taggart Road. Approximately 50 railcars were involved in the derailment, ten of which contained hazardous materials including vinyl chloride, combustible liquids (ethylene glycol monobutyl ether acetate, 2-ethylhexyl acrylate), isobutylene, n-butyl acrylate, and benzene residue (meaning the cars had previously carried benzene). A number of local, state, and federal agencies responded to the incident along with the railroad and their emergency response contractors. A precautionary evacuation and shelter-in-place was ordered to ensure the safety of the public.

The air has been, and is continued to be, tested 24 hours per day throughout the evacuation zone and in the community outside the evacuation zone. The results of air monitoring indicate no detections of vinyl chloride in the community and support that the air in the community is safe for residents to return home.

If you live within the evacuation zone, when you re-enter your home following the lift of evacuation orders, you will have the voluntary option of being accompanied by environmental professionals and a representative of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA), who will conduct air monitoring in and around your home to ensure that unsafe levels of substances are not present in your home.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is the air safe?

Yes – Air monitoring is being performed 24 hours a day in the community for the substances associated with the derailment and fire. Air monitoring results indicate that the air in the community is safe. Similarly, if you live within the evacuation zone, we will monitor the air in and around your home at your request to confirm that your home is safe to re-enter.

Is my drinking water safe?

Yes – the East Palestine water supply comes from a series of groundwater wells. Due to the location of the derailment, it is improbable that substances from the derailment have impacted or will impact the groundwater or drinking water wells in the area. We are performing sampling of surface waters downstream of the derailment site, but any surface water detections from the derailment will not affect your drinking water.

I smell a strange odor. Should I be worried?

Some of the substances associated with the derailment can be smelled even when instrument air monitoring findings are non-detect or below a level of concern. Similarly, non-hazardous materials can produce odors when on fire. While these odors may be irritating, they do not indicate that you are being exposed. Air monitoring in the community is ongoing and will continue until clean-up is complete.

I saw a big cloud of smoke. Are there any short-term health effects from breathing smoke?

The fire from the derailment has many similar constituents as a wood fire. Short-term exposure to fire smoke can cause respiratory irritation, but symptoms are expected to subside after exposure ends. Air monitoring for fire smoke and associated combustion products in the community is ongoing and will continue until clean-up is complete.

Are my children at risk? What about the elderly or people with medical conditions?

No – Air monitoring in the community has not shown any detections of vinyl chloride or levels of any other substances that would indicate a risk for children, the elderly, or individuals with medical conditions. Air monitoring in the community is ongoing and will continue until clean-up is complete.

Can exposure to substances from the derailment affect my/my child's asthma?

While smoke from any type of fire can exacerbate asthma or other breathing difficulties, no long-term effect is expected from short-term exposure. Only very high concentrations of vinyl chloride or other substances may affect someone's asthma, but any aggravation of asthma is expected to be transient and short-term, with no persistent or long-term effects. None of these substances are known to cause asthma.

Am I at risk for long-term health effects?

No – Short-term exposure to low levels of substances associated with the derailment does not present a long-term health risk to residents. Vinyl chloride and benzene may cause cancer in people exposed in the workplace to high concentrations for many years. However, there is no indication that any potential exposure that occurred after the derailment would increase the risk of cancer or any other long-term health effects in community members.

Are my pets safe?

Based on the air monitoring data collected, your pets should not have been affected by the derailment.

Is my food or my pet's food safe?

Food would not be affected by the incident, and you can safely eat any non-spoiled food that is in your home. You should, however, follow normal food safety procedures and make sure not to eat any food that has spoiled.

Can I turn on my home furnace?

It is safe to turn on your furnace and return to normal household activities. You do not have to change your furnace filter unless you want to.

What about my house plants and other vegetation?

Air monitoring indicates no danger to your house plants, trees, shrubs, or lawns. Based on the air monitoring data collected, your plants and vegetation should not have been affected by the derailment.

Have the streams and creeks been impacted?

Some of the substances associated with the derailment may have spilled into Sulphur Run. Water sampling is being conducted to determine the nature and extent of any impact to Sulphur Run and areas

downstream of Sulphur Run. The downstream creeks and streams do not supply drinking water, so any impact to the surface water does not pose a threat to your drinking water.

I have seen dead fish. Does that mean my drinking water or well water is not safe?

Your drinking water is safe. The creeks and streams do not supply drinking water in the area around the derailment.

Will vinyl chloride or other substances remain within my home or on my property?

No – Vinyl chloride and other substances associated with the derailment exist in the air as a vapor. They evaporate quickly and do not absorb into household materials. It is not necessary to undertake any special cleaning of household items or air, and any odors present in indoor air will dissipate. In addition, vinyl chloride and other substances associated with the derailment are not known to cause damage to vehicles or structures.

If you live within the evacuation zone, when you re-enter your home, you will have the voluntary option of being accompanied by an air monitoring team comprised of environmental professionals and a representative of the US EPA, who will conduct air monitoring in and around your home to ensure that unsafe levels of substances are not present in and around your home.

Will my home smell bad from the vinyl chloride?

No – At no point has air monitoring detected vinyl chloride. N-butyl acrylate has a low odor threshold, meaning that you can smell it at even lower concentrations than detectable by air monitoring equipment. While odors have been reported in the community, air monitoring data continue to indicate that there are no unsafe levels of substances in the air. Some people may notice an odor when re-entering their home after evacuation due to stale odors from the house sitting undisturbed, closed up tightly, and uninhabited for several days. If you encounter an odor that concerns you, you can open the windows and/or doors to promote ventilation. If you live within the evacuation zone, you also have the voluntary option of having the air in and around your home monitored by a re-entry air monitoring team.

Who do I reach out to with questions or concerns?

You may call the CTEH Taggart Road Incident Hotline at (234) 542-6474 to be connected with a toxicologist to discuss any questions or concerns. You may also contact the local non-emergency service by calling 211.

If I live within the evacuation zone and would like to participate in the residential re-entry air monitoring program, who do I contact to request air monitoring?

You may call the Residential Re-Entry Request Hotline at (330) 849-3919 to request air monitoring at your home.