

Breached Dam, Incineration of Soil Flood East Palestine with Fresh Fears of Toxins

"I've had fear and now this just put the anxiety over the top," said one local resident.

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The collapse Friday night of a makeshift dam designed to hold back wastewater and new concerns by local groups and residents about the nearby incineration of contaminated soil from last month's train derailment are the latest anxiety-producing woes to beset the community of East Palestine, Ohio.

Watchdogs on the ground reported that the dam broke after heavy rains in the area on Friday.

[According to](#) local *Channel 19 News*:

Residents tell 19 News heavy rain has caused Leslie Run Creek to rise, and spill over the makeshift dam, near the derailment sight. 19 News was able to obtain several photos of water from that manmade dam covering the Main Street area of town.

Residents fear the contaminated water may seep into homes or businesses—causing another level of fear for those who live in the area.

Local resident Eric Cozza told the news outlet he was scared of what the released waters could do to the community. "I fear that now the chemical is in the ground, it's going to leech towards the water ducts, our aquifer for drinking water," Cozza said. "I'm concerned that the park is now contaminated. Kids won't be able to play there or walk through there on their way to school."

Status Coup News, which has been reporting from East Palestine and speaking with residents since the disaster occurred, reported Friday night that flooding from the breached dam was going "into The Original Roadhouse restaurant parking lot where a lot of locals eat and drink."

The outlet also [reported](#) that the pictures of the broken dam posted to social media were taken by local resident Neko Figley, who was told by contractors to leave the area because it was “super dangerous to be here right now.”

From our organizer in East Palestine: the dam constructed to hold back toxic waste has broken after today’s heavy rain and the area is flooding.

Safe homes and independent testing NOW. pic.twitter.com/H5fBJTZMvI

— River Valley Organizing (@RiverValleyOrg) [March 4, 2023](#)

River Valley Organizing, a multi-racial, working-class group active in the Ohio River Valley region, said in a statement Friday that residents of East Palestine are still being ignored a month after 38 rail cars of a Norfolk Southern train went off the tracks on February 3.

“It’s been one month since our lives were turned upside down,” the group said, “but we still aren’t getting what we need from the government or Norfolk Southern. We heard the people of this community loud and clear: they want safe homes, and independent environmental and health testing—now.”

On Saturday, *The Guardian* reported on fresh fears over the incineration of contaminated soil that was taken from the crash site, not least because one of the nearby facilities where the material is being taken has a history of EPA violations. According to the *Guardian*:

The new plan is “horrific,” said Kyla Bennett, a former [EPA] official now with the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility non-profit. She is one among a number of public health advocates and local residents who have slammed Norfolk Southern and state and federal officials over the decision. [...]

Incinerating the soil is especially risky because some of the contaminants that residents and independent chemical experts fear is in the waste, like dioxins and PFAS, haven’t been tested for by the EPA, and they do not incinerate easily, or cannot be incinerated.

“Why on earth would you take this already dramatically overburdened community and ship this stuff a few miles away only to have it deposited right back where it came from?” Bennett asked.

She further [told](#) the *Guardian* that the “most important thing in my mind is the human health and health of the environment” and that burning this toxic material under such conditions flies “in the face of basic human decency and science.”

Penn Future, a watchdog for air and water quality in neighboring Pennsylvania, said the incineration plans are very worrying.

“The plan to incinerate dioxin and PFAS contaminated soil from Norfolk Southern’s toxic spill deeply troubles us and will continue to build distrust and anxiety,” the group [said](#). “It’s not clear the plan will work and puts communities down wind at risk of contamination.”

According to an update from the office of Ohio’s Republican Gov. Mike DeWine, the Ohio EPA has reported that approximately 1,700 tons of solid waste have been removed from the

disaster site in East Palestine as of Friday.

Of that waste, [reports](#) *The Chronicle-Telegram*, 660 tons has gone to Heritage Thermal Services—the company with a litany of past violations—in East Liverpool, Ohio, which is in Columbiana County not far from East Palestine. Another 190 tons was hauled to the Giles incinerator for in-state burning and 880 tons of the solid waste was shipped out of state to landfills in Michigan and Indiana.

Meanwhile, 3.2 million gallons of liquid wastewater have been collected in the area with the large majority going out of state, to facilities in Michigan and Texas, for deep-well injection.

Amanda Kiger, director of River Valley Organizing, said one of her concerns was the incineration of toxin-laden materials so close to the residents still reeling in East Palestine.

EPA and other government officials, she told the *Guardian*, “are just dumping more shit on Columbiana county,” Kiger said. “They say, ‘We already poisoned them so it doesn’t matter if we poison them more.’”

As for Cozza, who spoke with 19 News about the dam breach and whose family has already been diagnosed with skin irritations, he said the odor of chemicals is now back in the area.

“I have fear,” he said. “I’ve had fear and now this just put the anxiety over the top.”

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Featured image: An organizer with River Valley Organizing in East Palestine reported that “the dam constructed to hold back toxic waste has broken after [Friday’s] heavy rain” in the area. (Photo: via River Valley Organizing / Credit Neko Figley)

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