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### **Norfolk Southern's Derailment in Harmar, PA Demonstrates People's Vulnerability to Disaster from Shipping Petrochemicals by Rail**

Yesterday's derailment of multiple, leaking tanker cars that ended up polluting the Allegheny River with petrochemicals spotlights the substantial risks people in the Pittsburgh region are forced to take every day.

"Each time this happens it shows that we are playing a game of trying to dodge bullets as far as public safety is concerned," stated Glenn Olcerst, co-founder of Rail Pollution Protection Pittsburgh (RP3). "We have seen derailments in our region happening almost every year. This time petrochemicals leaked into a drinking water source for thousands of people in our region, the source of drinking water for Oakmont Water Authority, Wilksburg Penn-Joint Water Authority, and Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority, all adjacent or downstream to the derailment site."

The derailment highlights two key facts that RP3 has been communicating for some time:

- Train derailments in our region occur because of failures of private infrastructure. Private, unmarked rail crossings and private rail bridges are [infrastructure that tend to be in the poorest condition](#) and have the least transparency of their conditions. Poor, private infrastructure poses some of the greatest risks to people in the Pittsburgh area because unprotected rail crossings and failing bridges are all over the Pittsburgh region.
- Railroad public safety experts highlight that there is [no credible emergency response](#) to the severest potential derailments that result in explosions of and leaking of large quantities of petrochemical liquids being sent by rail every day through our region. It is essential that these sorts of risk are avoided.

"This current derailment in Harmar is another example of the failure of appropriate infrastructure," said Olcerst.

The Pittsburgh region is particularly vulnerable to these issues [because 40 – 50% of Bakken Shale Petrochemical liquids heading to the East Coast go through Pittsburgh rail lines](#), endangering hundreds of thousands of residents every day.

In 2019 RP3 called attention to crumbling steel infrastructure like the Merchant Street Bridge on the North Shore, a bridge that had not been rehabilitated in its 100-year life. RP3 spotted a sinkhole that was been hastily repaired with ballast stones at that time.

“Some 209,000 people live and work within a 1/2 mile of the ‘blast zone’ of this bridge,” said Olcerst. “Given the length of these oil trains, a derailment at Merchant Street could jeopardize not only people but our rivers.”

RP3 also questions the use of public monies by the rail industry to pay for infrastructure improvements.

“The public shouldn’t be subsidizing a profitable railroad company that hasn’t repaired infrastructure that the railroad has neglected,” said Barbara Talerico of RP3. “Before a penny of public money is spent, Norfolk Southern needs to follow through in its obligation to maintain its right-of-way and the infrastructure.

“We have no confidence that the railroad is doing what it needs to do to keep the community safe,” Talerico added. “The [derailment on the South Side in 2018](#), the [2019 sinkhole](#), and this current derailment in Harmar are clear examples.”

RP3 has created a [key list of rail safety failure points and suggestions](#) that regional leaders should address and policymakers and leaders should pursue.

### **ABOUT RP3**

*Rail Pollution Protection Pittsburgh (RP3) is a group of Pittsburgh residents committed to addressing the risk and impacts that expanding rail transport – and related oil/petrochemical facilities – have on nearby communities, especially public health, safety, air and water quality.*