



Rail Risks of Vinyl Chloride Trains in Pittsburgh + SWPA

Background

On Dec. 14, 2023, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced that vinyl chloride would be among the [five chemicals to begin the process for risk evaluation prioritization](#) under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) — an essential first step in a permanent ban. To appropriately determine risk, the evaluation must quantify real life exposure to this chemical.

The problem with the EPA's risk assessment is that they will NOT be considering risks related to vinyl chloride transportation by rail. The East Palestine vinyl chloride train derailment and the uncontrolled burn of vinyl chloride and its established health impacts on surrounding communities make it clear that this is a mistake. What happened in East Palestine could happen in other places, including Beaver County, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, which are on the same vinyl chloride train route as East Palestine ([Toxic Cargo](#)).

Vinyl chloride is a colorless gas made from petrochemicals and chlorine that is used to make PVC, and products like vinyl flooring, siding, pipes, toys and roofing. Vinyl chloride has also been known as a [human carcinogen](#) since the 1970s.

Vinyl chloride itself is hazardous. Putting vinyl chloride on a rail system that has been neglected and allowing cars to travel across rail bridges in disrepair that face increased degradation from climate change, combined with continued use of DOT-111 tank cars to transport flammable liquids like vinyl chloride, is a risk that the EPA must take into account when evaluating vinyl chloride under the TSCA.

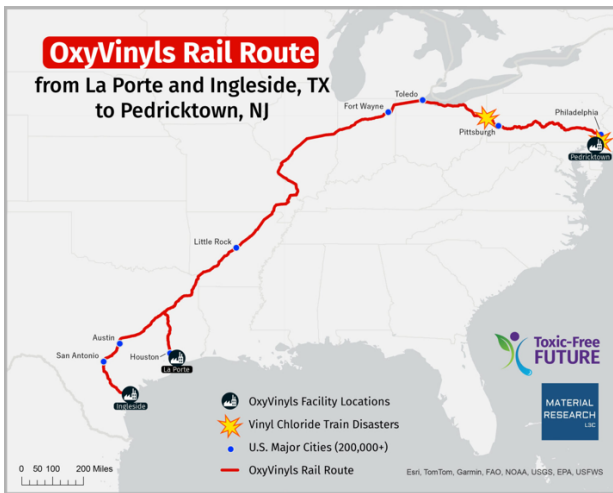
Breathe Collaborative Groups and Individuals Made the Following “Key Asks” of the EPA on October 2024

1. Asked the EPA to finalize the designation of vinyl chloride as high priority under the Toxic Substances Control Act
2. Asked the EPA to include the distribution & commerce of vinyl chloride, including rail transport and safety, in its risk assessment.
3. Asked the EPA to consult with Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) when making the risk exposure analysis of vinyl chloride's transport by rail.

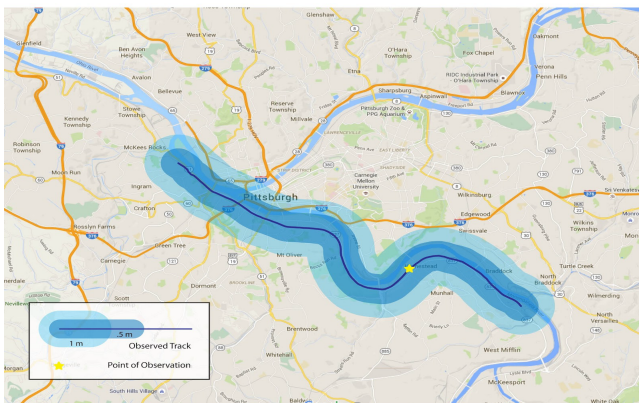
Facts about Vinyl Chloride Trains in SWPA

Trains Carrying Vinyl Chloride Regularly Travel Through Pennsylvania

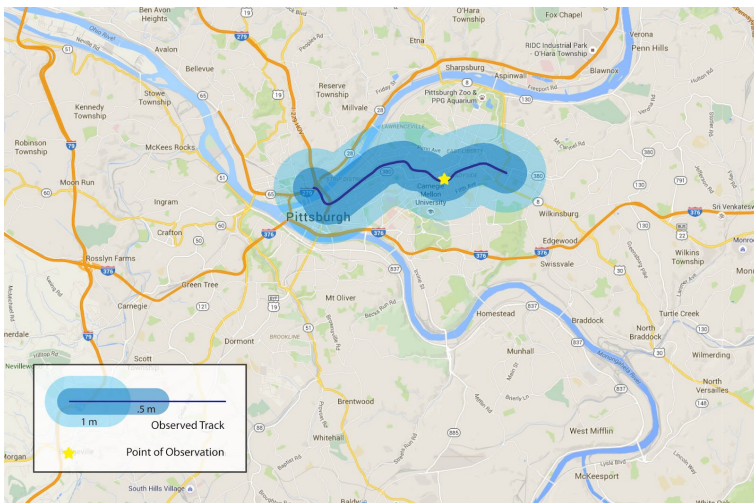
- The Norfolk Southern train carrying vinyl chloride that derailed in East Palestine was headed eastbound, destined for the Conway Railyard in Beaver County; Pittsburgh and Philadelphia ([Toxic Cargo](#) report by Toxic Free Future), densely populated areas.
- In 2015, Carnegie Mellon University CREATE Lab recorded vinyl chloride hazmat placards on train cars passing through specific rail lines in Pittsburgh marked 1086. (See detailed neighborhood maps below.)
- Vinyl chloride trains post a major risk to our communities and drinking water. Communities of color are disproportionately at risk.
- In the event of a major vinyl chloride rail spill or fire, the Dept. of Transportation (DOT) Emergency Response Guidebook (ERG) [recommends an initial downwind evacuation of 1/2 mile](#) in the event of a large vinyl chloride spill, and [an initial evacuation of one mile in all directions](#) if a rail car involving vinyl chloride is involved in a fire.



In Pittsburgh, Pa., an estimated 22,570 people and 11 schools are located within a one-mile radius of the vinyl chloride train route through Pittsburgh; 42% of this population are people of color. ([Toxic Cargo](#))

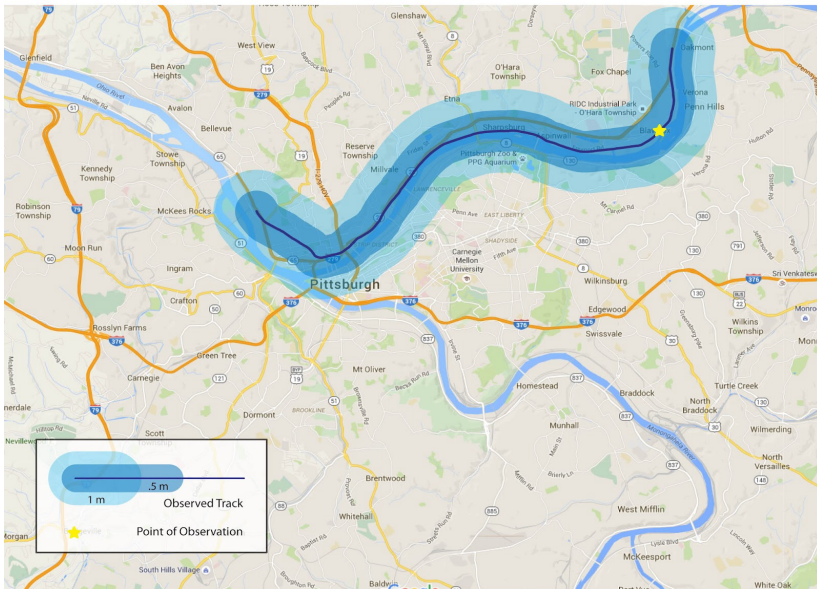


A derailment along the **Norfolk Southern Monongahela Line (ML)** could potentially affect the communities of Whitaker, Homestead, West Homestead, Braddock, Swissvale, Hazelwood, South Side, Allentown, Mt. Washington, South Oakland, Downtown, Crafton, Sheraden, and others.



Norfolk Southern's Pittsburgh Line (PT)

In a one week of observation in October 2015, CMU'S CREATE Lab camera observed three westbound trains passing through Shadyside carrying a total of 25 tanker cars labeled with the **hazmat placard 1086**, Vinyl Chloride. ([CMU CREATE Lab - Oil Train Project Report \(2015\)](#))



Norfolk Southern Conemaugh Line (LC)

- In one week of observation in June 2015, Carnegie Mellon University CREATE Lab cameras observed three eastbound trains passing through Blawnox carrying a total of 26 tanker cars labelled 1086, vinyl chloride. [[Source](#), [Source](#); CMU CREATE Lab - Oil Train Project Report (2015)]
- A vinyl chloride derailment along the **Norfolk Southern Conemaugh Line (LC)** creates direct risks to the communities of: North Shore, Millville, Etna, Sharpsburg, O'Hara, Blawnox, Fox Chapel, Oakmont, Verona, Penn Hills, Highland Park, Lawrenceville, Downtown and others

Sources

[NTSB; Railways Urgently Need to Adapt to the Impacts of Climate Change](#)

[Rail Bridge Oversight: Why Norfolk Southern Cannot Be Trusted](#)

[Poorly Rated Privately Owned Rail Bridges –The Real Danger That is Being Kept From You](#)

[A Dose of Climate Reality and Rail Risk](#)