

# Public Health Response to the East Palestine Train Derailment



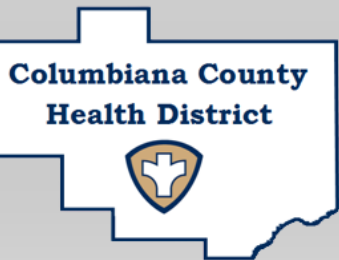
Photo by CBS News 2/5/23

---

GRETCHEN NICKELL, DO – MEDICAL DIRECTOR, COLUMBIANA COUNTY HEALTH DISTRICT

CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER, EAST LIVERPOOL CITY HOSPITAL

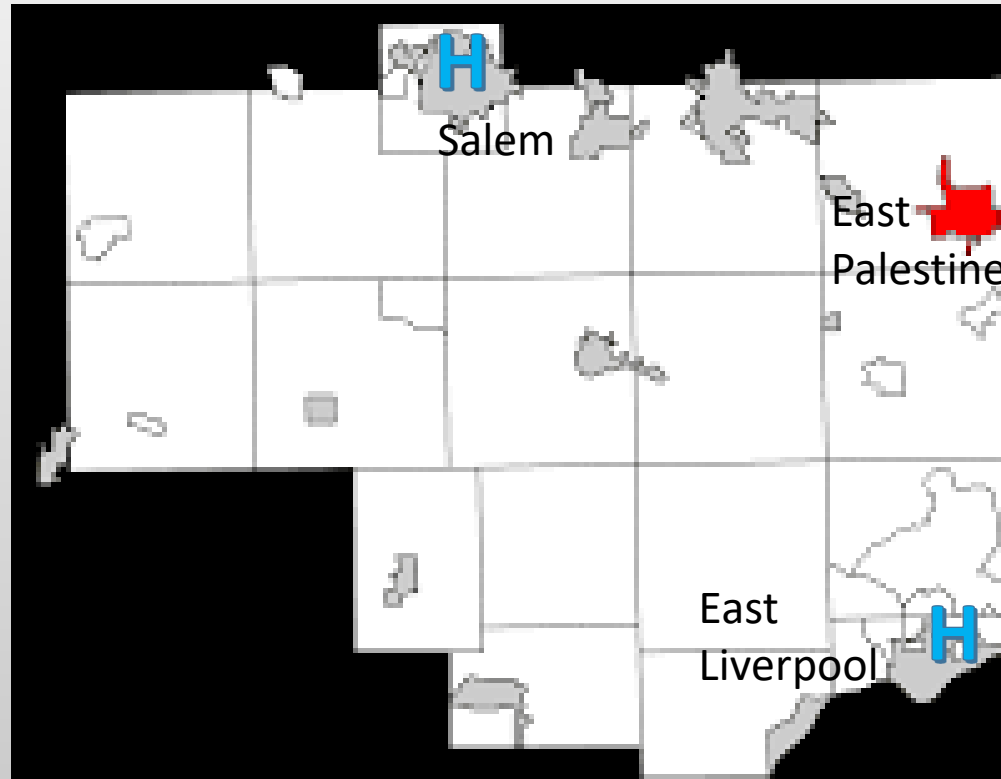
WESLEY VINS, DPA – HEALTH COMMISSIONER, COLUMBIANA COUNTY HEALTH DISTRICT



# East Palestine, Ohio Columbiana County

- Village of just under 5,000 residents
- Surrounding rural community to include an additional 2,000 residents
- No major industry or highways
- 2 Community Hospitals
- Legacy families and businesses
- Small town culture
- On February 3<sup>rd</sup>, East Palestine became a national focus and Public Health Responded....

Columbiana County



State of Ohio



<https://clipchamp.com/watch/Ggb7eynRI7M>

---

**FEBRUARY 3, 2023 TRAIN DERAILMENT IN EAST PALESTINE, OHIO  
RELEASE OF VINYL CHLORIDE, BUTYL ACRYLATE AND OTHER CHEMICALS**



# Feb 3, 2023 East Palestine Train Derailment

WKBN/Eric Whiting photo



Put  
The Fire  
Out!

"Stand by"  
Public Health  
prepares and  
works on the  
sidelines



1. Initial fire
2. vent and burn release
3. evacuations and re-entry
4. 40-50 responding entities
5. no hospital surge!



# The Public Health Response



*The coordinated public health response to the February 3, 2023 train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio that released vinyl chloride, butyl acrylate and other chemicals had several primary aspects of the multifaceted response.*

## Primary Public Health Response:

*ICS – Integrate Public Health*

*Public Information*

*Develop and implement residential well sampling*

*Establish a temporary health assessment clinic*

## Evolution of Primary Response:

*modifying the ICS roll of public health as response changes*

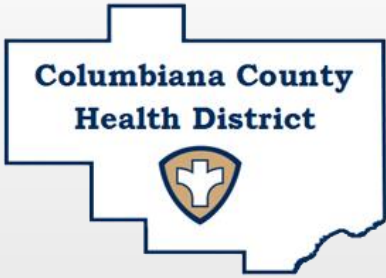
*maintaining consistent partner messaging*

*transition to a permanent health clinic*

*ongoing and long term residential well sampling*



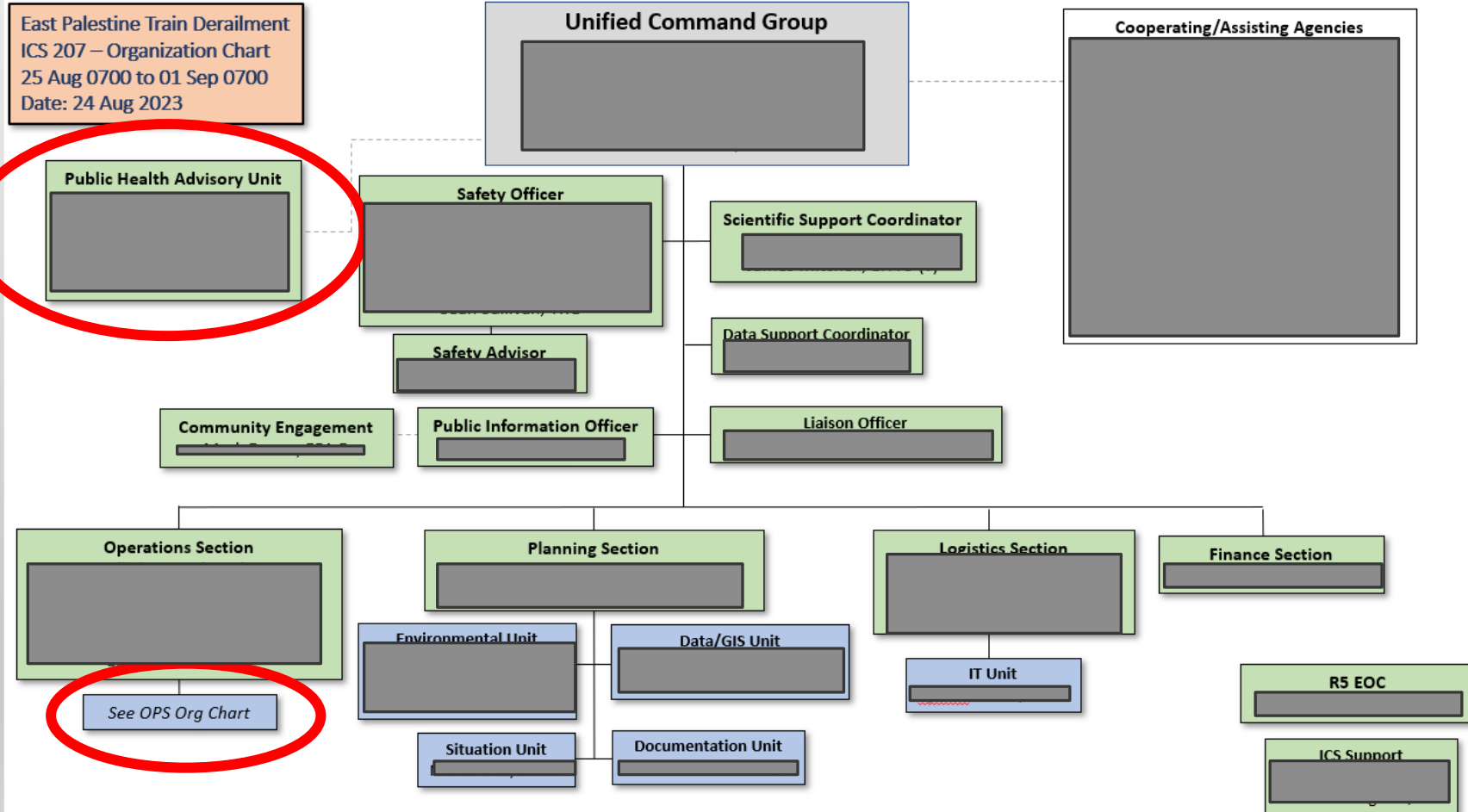
Photo by Melissa Smith, Morning Journal News 2/6/23



# East Palestine Train Derailment ICS Structure



Awarded 2022





## Public Information

Messaging  
Public Meetings  
Health Clinic  
Environmental  
Community Concerns  
Political Officials

**MORNING JOURNAL**

PRESIDENTIAL PROFILES  
**AMERICA'S LEADERS**  
Inside

**SATURDAY-SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18-19, 2023** [www.morningjournalnews.com](http://www.morningjournalnews.com) **\$1.75**

# 'Environmental disaster'

## Medical clinic to be set up in East Palestine

By **MARY ANN GRUBER**  
Staff Writer

**LISBON** — The Ohio Department of Health will establish a medical assessment clinic in East Palestine sometime next week where residents concerned about their health in the wake of the Feb. 3 train derailment can go for help.

Gov. Mike DeWine made the announcement during a press conference in Columbus streamed live on the Ohio Channel Friday.

DeWine said this is not based on air sampling or water sampling, because the testing has shown the water is safe to drink on the village water system and the air is clean, but he also knows the last two weeks have taken a tremendous toll



AP Photo/Gene J. Puskar

## Trump reportedly coming to East Palestine

**EAST PALESTINE** — Former President Donald Trump will travel to East Palestine next week to visit the area and members of the community as they grapple with the aftermath of the train derailment that led to a large release of toxic chemicals, according to Fox News.

A source familiar with the former president's plans told Fox News that Trump plans to travel to East Palestine on Wednesday to meet with members of the community. The source said Trump has a strong relationship with the people of Ohio.

A Norfolk Southern train carrying hazardous chemicals, including vinyl chloride, derailed and caught fire on Feb. 3. Fire and HazMat officials decided several days later to do a controlled burn of the affected cars because they were worried about a catastrophic explosion.

## Concerns remain after spill, plume in East Palestine

**Team coverage**





## Public Information



Designating a trained agency PIO contact who provided timely and transparent responses built trust with the media and community.

Field staff and front line staff were provided PIO messaging

Other partners (and non-partners) messaging - Responding was challenging at times

Aggressive media (national vs. local)

Consistency in messaging! – we stayed in our lane



# Public Meetings

- Large
- Intense
- Security
- Messaging
- Unpredictable/unscripted
- Resident's concerns
- Activists
- Partners



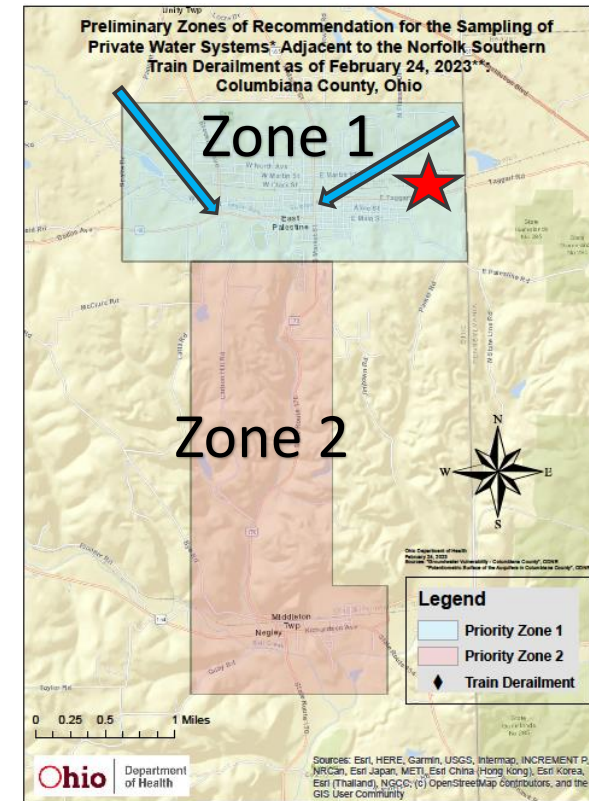


# Residential Well Sampling



## INITIAL PROGRAM

- Mahoning County Health, Ohio EPA and ODH
- Norfolk Southern - Summit Environmental Lab
- Establish plan based on risk 180 parameters
- Sample EP Village well field February 10, 2023
- ODNR well as interceptor for early detection
- NS/AECOM establishes call center to schedule
- Residential wells closest to derailment – (de-identify)
- Establish Zones 1 and 2



\*For those on private water systems, ODH is recommending drinking bottled water until you have the results of your private water system test. Call 330-849-3919 to schedule a free private water system test.

\*\*Map as of February 24, 2023. Recommended sampling zones are subject to change.



# Residential Well Sampling



## INITIAL PROGRAM (CONTINUED)

- NS installs sentinel wells and split all samples
- Results reviewed by CCHD and ODH, assisted by Ohio EPA
- CCHD call to resident with verbal results
- Lab report sent to resident and posted on CCHD website (w/o address or name)
- Regional LHD support critical to support 4 field teams
  - Community resistance to NS staff
  - Trust!
  - RS expertise in well sampling and community education

## CHALLENGES

- Residents outside the zones
- J values as detections or "Hits"
- Scheduling through contractor
- Media following field staff
- 3<sup>rd</sup> party independent samplers
- Sample all wells every 30 to 45 days
- Detections of constituents unrelated to derailment
- Staffing - Two Sanitarians per team



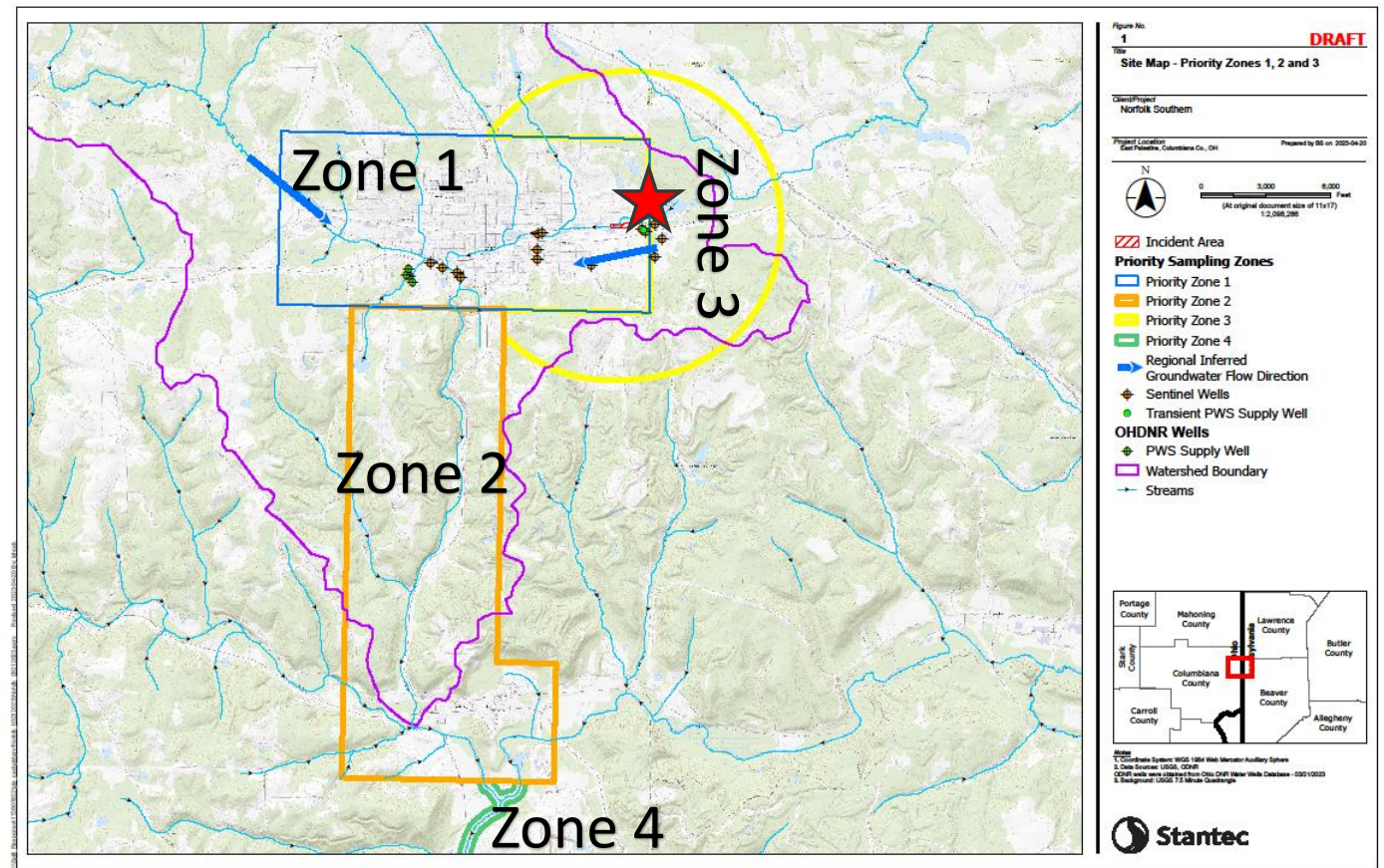


# Residential Well Sampling



## EVOLUTION OF PROGRAM

- Ohio EPA samples Village wells
- Lab results turn around times decrease
- 29 parameters
- Split samples with NS/Stantec for validation
- ODNR well replaced with more sentinel well
- Establish additional Zones 3 and 4
- Reduce sampling team to one RS
- Sample every 45-60 days





# Residential Well Sampling

## Special thanks to:

**ODH** – Gene Phillips, Audry Blakeman, Anne Gregg, Brandon Blakeman, Mary Shaffer

**Ohio EPA** – Aaron Muller, Amy Klie, James Fisher

## **Local Health Districts:**

Ashtabula County  
Jefferson County  
Lake County  
Lorain County  
Mahoning County  
Medina County  
Portage County  
Stark County  
Summit County  
Trumbull County  
Tuscarawas County  
Wayne County

- CCHD uses and Summit Environmental laboratory independent of NS
- All samples collected are co-sampled with NS contractor Stantec

## **9/12/23 Private Drinking Water Sampling Totals**

**801 total private drinking water samples collected by CCHD**

245 first round samples  
201 second round samples  
161 third round samples  
119 fourth round samples  
56 fifth round samples  
18 sixth round samples  
1 seventh round sample

790 final sample results received, 446 residents contacted by CCHD\*  
0 final samples yet to be reviewed  
690 final samples with no detections from CCHD samples  
100 final sample results with detection from CCHD samples  
98 with readings below established limits  
2 with readings with exceedances

\* residents with 3<sup>rd</sup> round samples and beyond are only be contacted by phone if a detection occurs, reports will be set to the resident regardless of sample result

# Partners! Partners! Partners!

**Not all partners will respond as you  
have trained or planned, but others  
will far exceed your expectations**

LHDs – good neighbors

PHEP-NECO region

ODH

OEPA

USEPA

CDC/ATSDR

Federal/State Elected Officials

Laboratory and suppliers

Medical providers/hospitals

Mental Health (local/state)

Media



# Ongoing Response

LHD – Accessible and Reliable Point of Contact for Residents

Public informational sessions

Permanent Health Clinic

Residential well sampling

PHEP response plan updates

Media inquiries

Funding – short/long

Relationship maintenance

Advocacy for change – legislation/policy

Public Records requests and legal support



# Lessons Learned - Recommendations

- Staff training – ICS, 214 forms
- Keep plans up to date - exercise plans
- Dedicated Public Information Officer
- Use the JIC if possible, but always stay in your lane
- Media demands and challenges
- Communicate information timely
- Maintain relationships and trust with partners and the community in advance
- Environmental monitoring is a long time commitment
- Political figures can be extremely helpful, but they can also complicate the response and messaging



Columbus Dispatch photo