

Ohio Churches Offer Aid Amidst Ecological Disaster

A freight train carrying various volatile chemicals derailed in East Palestine, Ohio, on Feb. 3 causing what some are calling “one of the worst industrial chemical disasters in American History.”

The severity of the incident has already brought with it a federal lawsuit by Pennsylvania residents calling for the rail operator, Norfolk Southern, to begin setting up health monitoring stations and as reported by the Associated Press, “calls for the rail operator to pay for medical screenings and related care for anyone living within a 30-mile (48-kilometer) radius of the derailment to determine who was affected by toxic substances released after the derailment. The lawsuit also is seeking undetermined damages.”

Residents have been overwhelmed with fear and uncertainty as chemicals such as vinyl chloride, ethylhexyl acrylate, ethylene glycol monobutyl ether, and butyl acrylate were aboard the derailed and breached trains.



As reported by The Blaze, “Silverado Caggiano, a hazardous materials specialist, told WKBN that ethylhexyl acrylate is a carcinogen that can cause burning and irritation in the skin and eyes, as well as breathing problems. He noted that isobutylene can also cause dizziness and drowsiness if inhaled.

“We basically nuked a town with chemicals so we could get a railroad open.”

Along with the listed chemicals, other toxic chemicals contained in the fumes were hydrogen chloride and phosgene.

The derailment led to Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine (R) and Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro (D) to issue warnings to those living within a one-mile radius of the accident, saying they were in “grave danger of death” by staying in their towns.



With fears of the chemicals tainting the water table, harming local fish and wildlife and the fear of health complications from the chemical fumes, residents have a familiar comforter in this time of hardship: The body of Christ.

Churches in the area have risen to the call for help from those in need and are partnering with Norfolk Southern to provide assistance to those impacted by the disaster.

Yet some of the local churches are impacted by the toxic fumes themselves.

As reported by The Roys Report, “First Church of Christ is located just a mile from the derailment site and wasn’t able to do much until late Wednesday, when the evacuation order was lifted. Since then, the church’s building has been a respite for some in need and a source of spiritual help.”

A few miles away from the East Palestine derailment however, Abundant Life Fellowship has partnered with Norfolk Southern and turned their fellowship hall into a Family Assistance Center.

Spokesman for Norfolk Southern Conor Spielmaker said that the company is there to offer aid to the community, as well as reimburse “crisis-related expenses.”

“Our employees are there to provide help for this community,” Spielmaker said. “We want people to come and seek that help.”

Senior Pastor of Abundant Life Fellowship Jeff Schoch had discussed with the town’s mayor, Shane Patrone, that ALF was uniquely suited to serve the community during this time with

the church having a donation center and food pantry available separate from the rail operator's assistance center.

"It's mostly meeting practical needs, but we've had some opportunities to pray with people," said Schoch. "We're trying to represent Jesus the best we can by giving love and care to whoever comes in the door."

As people learned of the good work that ALF was doing in the wake of such a horrific disaster, word spread on social media. People from outside the community soon were contacting them and dropping off badly needed supplies to the church.

"I know Facebook can be a terrible thing, but it can also be a really productive thing in terms of getting the word out about something that's going on," said Schoch. "We didn't do anything to solicit donations or pay for any of this. Yet we're getting the benefits of people embracing us, with tears coming down their cheeks."

Unfortunately, time will tell the ramifications of this ecological nightmare. People are reporting dead fish and wildlife within the area, with residents like Amanda Breshears who lives 10 miles away from East Palestine, reporting farm animals suddenly dying.

"My video camera footage shows my chickens were perfectly fine before they started this burn, and as soon as they started the burn, my chickens slowed down and they died," she told WKBN. "If it can do this to chickens in one night, imagine what it's going to do to us in 20 years."

Ohio EPA spokesperson James Lee said in a statement last Wednesday that the EPA had "established a series of containment measures to help limit environmental impact to local streams and rivers from water runoff from the site," but there is no way of knowing the environmental, and human, impact at this time.

One thing is for certain, those impacted by this tragedy need both prayers and practical support in the matter. This is a moment in time that Christians have the ability to reach out and provide support to those in need after a horrifying disaster with unknown consequences. Items such as bottled, uncontaminated water and food are a luxury for those in the area struggling to move forward in their lives.

As Paul exhorts the church in Philippians 2:4, “Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others,” so too should the church of today look towards those in need and provide what assistance they can.
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