

February 10, 2023

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

To: Mayor and Members of City Council

From: Sheryl M.M. Long, City Manager 

Subject: East Palestine, OH Train Derailment

The purpose of this memo is to provide information about the impact of the recent train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio. Greater Cincinnati Water Works (GCWW) is actively monitoring the situation, and stands continuously ready to protect our drinking water quality.

On February 3, 2023, a Norfolk Southern train carrying hazardous materials derailed in East Palestine, Ohio. Several of the rail cars ruptured, spilling vinyl chloride and butyl acrylate chemicals. Both chemicals are used in industrial processes, primarily in the manufacture of plastics and resins. In addition, several of the rail cars caught fire, resulting in evacuations of the immediate area for several days.

Hazardous materials teams from the Ohio and US EPAs responded quickly and took measures to contain contamination from these compounds, but low levels of butyl acrylate have been detected in samples of the Ohio River downstream of the incident, but currently far upstream of Cincinnati.

The Greater Cincinnati Water Works (GCWW) is currently working with the Ohio EPA, the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission (ORSANCO), and other water utilities along the river to collect samples and perform additional analyses to assess any potential threat to our drinking water. GCWW is also a member of a network of Ohio River users which monitors the water quality for just this type of contamination. Through this network, GCWW will be able to track this compound and act if needed to assure the quality of the drinking water.

If this compound is detected near Cincinnati, GCWW can shut the river intakes for a period of time to avoid the compound altogether. The Granular Activated Carbon (GAC) used in GCWW's water treatment plant and other steps in the treatment process will remove the compound so no impact to the drinking water quality is expected.

cc: William Weber, Assistant City Manager
Virginia Tallent, Interim Assistant City Manager