

Misti Allison Testimony

Thank you for inviting me to testify. I'm honored to be here, but wish it were under better circumstances. I'm here to put a face on this chemical disaster. This isn't a political issue. It is a people issue.

Four years ago, my husband and I moved to his hometown of East Palestine, Ohio. We love raising our two children in Small Town America - where our family all lives down the road.

Everyone who lives here is aware of the long trains that regularly pass by. But we've never really thought much about them. Until the night of February 3rd. Now, we can't think about anything else.

We will never forget the night 38 cars of a Norfolk Southern freight train derailed. It erupted into a fire that released toxic chemicals into our air, water, and land — about a mile from my home.

I could see a huge fireball from my driveway. It didn't seem real. Something was horribly wrong. Little did we know, this was only the beginning.

My family chose to evacuate when a chemical smell persisted after the crash. But many of our neighbors did not. None of us knew exactly what dangers were on that train.

But we now know that train carried multiple petrochemicals, including vinyl chloride, which is linked to cancers and especially harmful to infants and children.

Three days later authorities released toxic chemicals from five tankers—in a so-called “controlled burn.” We watched as a huge cloud of black smoke overtook our village. It was like a bomb went off. We were all terrified. And we're even more terrified now that we know burning vinyl chloride can result in the release of toxic chemicals that never go away, including hydrogen chloride and dioxins.

No amount of dioxins is considered safe for humans.

And the damage caused by these chemicals may not show up for many years.

On February 8th, two days later, our government told us it was “safe” to come home. Within minutes, a train went through town - on top of highly contaminated soil that was left behind.

But we don't know if it's really safe. Since returning home, people and animals are sick. The EPA is telling us the data is fine while independent researchers are telling us that there are high levels of acrolein and other cancerous chemicals around us. Who do we trust with these conflicting reports?

Some of the companies testing for toxic chemicals are paid by Norfolk Southern. How could their findings be unbiased? They are not a neutral third party. How can we trust them to act in the interests of public safety?

Mental health is also a huge issue right now. The anxiety is real. My 7-year-old son has asked me if he is going to die from being in his own home.

Kids are not allowed to play on the playground because it hasn't been cleaned. So the kids now play a game they invented called "EVACUATION" during recess. This train derailment has robbed our kids of their childhood, and perhaps more.

The damage caused by Norfolk Southern's gross negligence is immeasurable. This preventable accident has put a scarlet letter on our town. People don't want to come here. Sports teams refuse to play here. Events won't be held here. Businesses are struggling. Our home values are plummeting. Even if we wanted to leave, we couldn't. Who would buy our homes?

There were over a thousand train derailments last year, and the rapid expansion of the petrochemical industry into the Ohio River Valley, Texas, and Louisiana means that more trains carrying toxic chemicals will be traveling through more communities. This puts all our families further at risk.

As Senator Vance said last week, we can—and we must—have strong businesses. But that doesn't mean businesses should be allowed to reject common sense safety regulations. Americans need to be protected. And when these organizations fail to operate safely, they must be held accountable.

Months from now, when Norfolk Southern has removed the debris, patted themselves on the back, and moved on from this horrendous disaster, my family, my friends, and my neighbors will still be living with the aftermath and the uncertainty.

Alan Shaw has repeatedly said that Norfolk Southern will "make it right." But who determines what is right in a situation like this? East Palestine residents expect real steps with measurable results including: 1. short- and long-term healthcare monitoring and assistance, 2. home value protection, and 3. an actionable economic development plan to ensure our community can recover and thrive.

As though this train derailment wasn't enough, less than two weeks ago, my mother lost her three-year battle with cancer.

My mother taught me to fight for what's right. And I will always fight to protect the health and safety of my children... of your children...and of every child in America.

That's the decision that you will be making. This is about people. This is about a community no one had ever heard of becoming ground zero and a small town being destroyed overnight.

We ask you to support basic safety regulations so this doesn't happen again.

We can never go back to our life before this disaster, but we can make sure that East Palestine not only recovers but thrives. And that no other community experiences this tragedy.

My mom always told me, "Either you find a way, or you find an excuse."

It's time to collectively learn from this and move forward with bipartisan support and the support of Norfolk Southern. Let's find a way. Not another excuse.

Thank you.