



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
Investigative Hearing

Norfolk Southern Railway general merchandise freight train 32N
derailment with subsequent hazardous material release and fires,
in East Palestine, Ohio, on February 3, 2023

GROUP	H
EXHIBIT	
44	

Agency / Organization

Village of East Palestine

Title

Statement for the Record – Keith A. Drabick

**National Transportation Safety Board
East Palestine Hearing
Opening Statement, East Palestine Fire Chief Keith Drabick**

Good morning. I am East Palestine Fire Chief Keith Drabick. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to participate in this proceeding and to begin with a statement.

I am sure I speak for all of us in the room and in East Palestine when I say that none of us would prefer to be here today. The train derailment has, quite frankly, changed East Palestine forever. It has disrupted lives, impacted businesses and created uncertainty.

Thankfully, no one was killed and the damage to property was minimal. For that miracle, I am grateful to my fellow East Palestine fire department members – all of whom are volunteers – to East Palestine Police Chief James Brown and his officers, to our village's other first responders and to the first responders from the many other departments in our region who came to our aid. Your training, professionalism and commitment to saving lives shone through and you are an honor to your professions.

Thanks also goes to the collective local, state and federal incident response team for their extraordinary effort during those chaotic days and nights in February. I was the incident commander, but I can assure you that with the combined expertise at our command center, my role was more of a coordinator. If not for the collective judgment of the men and women on that team, we would be having a very different discussion today about a very different outcome.

The reason that the incident response team was able to produce the results it did for the people of East Palestine is because of one word: "consensus." On decisions both big and small, the team pulled together, shared their experience, knowledge and training, reached a conclusion and then went forward together. Even on a decision as challenging as the decision to vent and burn, it was a team decision. Everyone from our governor, Mike DeWine, to local officials contributed their voices to that discussion and, in the end, the decision to vent and burn was agreed to without dissent, as the least bad option, and as the only option for avoiding a much more severe explosion, fire, and far-reaching contamination.

East Palestine will be living with the impact of the derailment for many years to come. Questions about health, water, property values and the continued economic viability of our beautiful village will remain. While these proceedings and the NTSB's work do not directly relate to some of those questions, it is my hope that, through this process, some questions can be answered. And, with those answers, it is my hope that our collective focus can move forward and our energies can be applied to working together to solve other challenges.

I appreciate the NTSB for taking the rare step of conducting its hearing here in East Palestine and that the village has been afforded the status of an official party to the proceedings today. I look forward to the information that will be gathered and the testimony that will be presented. I look forward, as we all do, to the NTSB's final report and its findings. The residents of East Palestine want to know how this happened; how

and when it will be fixed; and what actions will be taken so that it never happens again – in East Palestine and every other community. I hope today's hearing will provide us with additional information needed for us to learn, process, heal, rise, and grow stronger.

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