



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	
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Agency / Organization

OxyVinyls

Title

**Statement for the Record –
Paul Thomas**

**OXYVINYLs — NTSB INVESTIGATION
THOMAS OPENING STATEMENT**

Madam Chairperson, Members of the NTSB Board, Ladies and Gentlemen:

My name is Paul Thomas. I am the Vice President of Health, Environment, Safety, and Security for OxyVinyls. With me today is Steve Smith, the Technical Manager at OxyVinyls' vinyl chloride manufacturing facility in La Porte, Texas.

I first want to acknowledge the East Palestine community and those who participated in the response effort following the derailment of Norfolk Southern Train 32N in February of this year. We recognize the impact the derailment has had on your community, and we would like to thank Chief Keith Drabick and all the first responders for their service. We are committed to supporting the agency's investigation of the incident in East Palestine and look forward to addressing questions from the panel to the best of our ability.

As a shipper that relies on railroads to safely transport our products, OxyVinyls shares the agency's goal of investigating transportation incidents and taking steps to prevent a recurrence. In my opening comments, I would like to offer a brief overview of OxyVinyls, provide context regarding our involvement in the incident, and summarize the technical support we provided to those handling the response.

OxyVinyls is a global chemical manufacturer. Our products elevate the quality of life for millions of people around the world. Our products help ensure safe drinking water, are essential to the manufacturing of medical devices, and form the building blocks for everyday household goods. They also enable critical technologies and construction products that further prosperity and advance energy efficiency. One of our products, polyvinyl chloride or "PVC," is essential for safe water supply infrastructure; a broad array of medical applications, including medical bags and tubing; personal protective equipment such as face shields and surgical gloves; and long-lasting building and construction

applications such as siding, windows, and flooring. We are honored to help meet important and everyday needs across industries and geographies.

We were one of multiple shippers that had railcars on Train 32N. Specifically, five cars with our stabilized vinyl chloride monomer or “VCM” — a raw material used to make PVC — were on the train.

The railcars carrying OxyVinyls’ product did not initiate the derailment. Another car has been preliminarily identified as initiating the derailment when it suffered a wheel bearing failure. The cars carrying our product derailed because of that failure.

Five other companies had a combined total of six tank cars involved in the derailment that contained hazardous materials, including: (1) Ethylene glycol monobutyl ether; (2) Ethylhexyl acrylate; (3) Isobutylene; (4) Butyl acrylate; and (5) Benzene. Many of these railcars breached upon derailing, which released their contents into the environment. The contents of some of these cars fueled the initial fires at the derailment scene.

The five tank cars carrying OxyVinyls’ product derailed without breaching — meaning the tanks on the cars remained intact following the derailment. The pressure relief devices on all five cars operated as intended, preventing damage to the tanks by relieving the elevated pressures caused by the surrounding fires.

Following the derailment, OxyVinyls activated its Special Situations Team, sent a technical team to East Palestine, and communicated with Norfolk Southern and its contractors regarding the properties of stabilized VCM and advised them to monitor the temperature of the railcars. To my knowledge, no other shippers responded with this level of support.

I will provide further detail regarding our response, but want to clarify at the outset that OxyVinyls was not part of the Unified Incident Command. Our participation was limited to helping Norfolk Southern and its contractors understand relevant characteristics regarding our product by providing technical support.

On the morning of Saturday, February 4, OxyVinyls was notified that a derailment had occurred on a train with tank cars carrying OxyVinyls' product. When we learned that some of our cars were adjacent to other cars that had breached and caught fire, we activated our Special Situation Team at our headquarters in Dallas, Texas.

In the evening on Saturday, February 4, representatives of OxyVinyls spoke directly with representatives of Norfolk Southern and its emergency response contractors regarding conditions at the derailment site. We communicated to Norfolk Southern and its contractors the chemical and physical properties of stabilized VCM. We made clear, based on our expertise of the chemical properties of our product, that stabilized VCM would be unlikely to spontaneously polymerize under the conditions described to us by Norfolk Southern and its contractors.

Polymerization of VCM is a very exothermic reaction, which generates significant heat resulting in increased pressure within its container. If that pressure is not relieved, it can cause the failure of the container. Because it is an exothermic reaction, a polymerization reaction has a very distinct heat signature: the temperature rises and continues rising. For this reason, we emphasized to Norfolk Southern and its contractors the importance of monitoring the temperature of the railcars.

On the morning of Sunday, February 5, we further reinforced our view that polymerization was not occurring during a call with Norfolk Southern representatives.

Consistent with our commitment to product stewardship, OxyVinyls also dispatched a three-person team to Ohio. OxyVinyls' goal in sending the team was simple — we wanted to make certain that we had representatives on the ground who could serve as a resource to Norfolk Southern and those managing the response effort. We also wanted to provide a point of contact to serve as a conduit for information flow back to our Dallas team. My colleague on the panel, Steve Smith, led that team. Steve's team arrived in East Palestine on the afternoon of Sunday, February 5.

On Sunday evening, Steve met with Norfolk Southern's emergency response contractors and — for the third time — stated OxyVinyls' view that polymerization of VCM was not occurring.

In summary, although our railcars did not initiate the derailment and did not breach in the derailment, we provided technical support to Norfolk Southern and its emergency response contractors. We sent a team to Ohio to support Norfolk Southern's response efforts. We provided information regarding stabilized VCM. We advised that the temperature of the railcars should be monitored, and we communicated our view that polymerization was not occurring.

I want to emphasize that we did not have direct access to real-time information regarding conditions at the derailment site, we were not in the room with the Incident Commander and other decision-makers regarding the vent and burn operation, and we did not participate in or recommend the decision on the vent and burn operation.

Thank you for inviting OxyVinyls to participate in the Investigative Hearing. As I noted at the outset, we share the agency's goal of investigating this incident to prevent a recurrence. Steve and I look forward to answering your questions.