

# EPA prioritizes vinyl chloride for TSCA risk evaluation, same chemical that burned in Ohio train disaster

*Cancer-causing vinyl chloride is a key ingredient in production of PVC plastic, used in building materials and packaging; Public health groups call for ban*

WASHINGTON, D.C., UNITED STATES, December 14, 2023 /

EINPresswire.com/ -- Today, the [U.S. EPA announced](#) the beginning of a

regulatory process to designate vinyl chloride as a high-priority chemical under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA). Made from fossil fuels, and used almost exclusively to make polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic, [vinyl chloride is known to](#) cause a range of serious harms, including cancer, reduced immune function, and neurological effects—but remains one of the highest production volume chemicals in the U.S. and the world, with billions of pounds produced in the U.S. in 2019, according to EPA.

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*Liz Hitchcock, director of Toxic-Free Future's federal policy program*

Vinyl chloride is one of five chemicals the EPA announced that it is considering acting on, with four of the five used to make plastic products. In addition to vinyl chloride, the EPA is reviewing acetaldehyde, acrylonitrile, benzenamine, and 4,4'-Methylene bis(2-chloroaniline) (MBOCA).

TSCA requires the EPA to consider all pathways of exposure to vinyl chloride—from air, water, drinking water, and soil—and all contexts of exposure, including in

workplaces, from chemical plant disasters and transportation accidents that result in releases of vinyl chloride, as occurred this year in East Palestine, Ohio.

“Naming vinyl chloride a candidate for high-priority evaluation under TSCA is welcome news. The examination of all routes of exposure prescribed by the law will lead EPA to the conclusion



that vinyl chloride is far too dangerous to make or use, and should be banned,” said Liz Hitchcock, director of Safer Chemicals Healthy Families, the federal policy program of Toxic-Free Future. “Vinyl chloride threatens our health and contaminates the environment from manufacture through disposal, with workers and people who live near chemical facilities and along vinyl chloride distribution routes experiencing the greatest exposures and danger, as was shown so vividly by this year’s disaster in East Palestine, Ohio.”

“We applaud EPA for echoing states’ concerns about the threat of vinyl chloride and PVC to communities. This action, along with action by states to restrict the use of PVC in packaging and building materials in favor of safer materials, will help communities thrive,” said Sarah Doll, national director of Safer States. “The urgency of vinyl chloride’s threat means we need action from all levels of government.”

“Some of the world’s biggest companies have already recognized the dangers of vinyl chloride and PVC plastic and phased it out years ago,” said Mike Schade, director of Mind the Store, a program of Toxic-Free Future. “Apple, IKEA, and Nike are just three examples of major businesses that have eliminated this poison plastic. Other major brands and retailers shouldn’t wait for the EPA to act. Retailers that sell PVC products, especially building materials, should move quickly to phase out PVC and substitute it with safer materials.”

“We have seen firsthand what vinyl chloride can do to a community,” said Hilary Flint, vice president of Unity Council for the East Palestine Train Derailment and director of communications and community engagement for Beaver County Marcellus Awareness Community. “This is a step in the right direction and we will continue to fight for a total vinyl chloride ban. We want to make sure what happened after the East Palestine train derailment is the last vinyl chloride disaster in the United States.”

## BACKGROUND ON VINYL CHLORIDE

Vinyl chloride is the basic building block for making polyvinyl chloride (PVC), a widely-used plastic that harms health and the environment during production, use, and disposal. Vinyl chloride is a known human carcinogen associated with liver cancer, brain and lung cancers, and cancers of the blood, and can be found in air, water, and soil. Despite its well-documented harms, companies continue to produce the chemical and use it to make PVC pipes, packaging materials, cars, children’s toys, and building materials like flooring and wall coverings.

From production to disposal, vinyl chloride threatens health and contaminates the environment. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have all identified vinyl chloride as a known human carcinogen.

According to [Toxic-Free Future’s 2023 report PVC Poison Plastic](#), billions of pounds of vinyl chloride are produced in the U.S. each year, with approximately 99% used to produce PVC and its copolymers. The production of PVC plastic releases hundreds of thousands of pounds of

carcinogenic vinyl chloride into the air every year in the U.S.

Many vinyl chloride facilities are located in communities with more residents who are people of color and/or lower-income, resulting in disproportionate exposure to vinyl chloride emissions. Over the years, people in low-income communities of color have been forced to relocate due to vinyl chloride and contamination from PVC plants in at least four different largely African American communities in Louisiana including Mossville, Reveilletown, Morrisonville, and Plaquemine. Breakdown of vinyl chloride can lead to the formation of formaldehyde, and burning it, such as in incinerators, generates chlorinated byproducts including dioxins, considered to be among the most toxic chemicals on the planet.

In many communities near petrochemical facilities, the harms from exposure to vinyl chloride are compounded by co-exposures to other carcinogens and stress, and these cumulative risks must be considered by EPA as it assesses the risks posed by vinyl chloride.

As the recent disaster in East Palestine, Ohio demonstrates, people living along rail routes used to transport vinyl chloride are in danger of significant exposures to this dangerous chemical. It will be critically important for EPA to evaluate these risks under TSCA.

TSCA requires EPA to consider the risks to infants and children, who are particularly vulnerable to lifelong harms from vinyl chloride. For residents that live within a three-mile radius of a vinyl chloride, PVC manufacturing, or PVC waste disposal facility, 27% are children, compared to the national average of 22%. TSCA also requires EPA to consider the risks to workers, some of whom experience high levels of exposure to vinyl chloride.

Vinyl chloride has also been detected at many federal Superfund hazardous waste sites.

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