



NEWS FROM **ULSTER COUNTY** *County Executive Jen Metzger*

******For Immediate Release******

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Ulster County Executive Jen Metzger Responds to Letter From Municipalities On HazMat Trains

KINGSTON, NY - Ulster County Executive Jen Metzger responded today to a letter sent by Ulster County Town Supervisors and Mayors reacting to the train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio and the ensuing environmental disaster caused by the leak and combustion of hazardous materials transported by the train. The response from the County Executive outlined the roles and responsibilities of the various layers of government and invited the Mayors and Supervisors to attend an educational roundtable discussion in the near future to help them understand the readiness plans created and maintained by local fire departments and municipal agencies.

In the letter, **Ulster County Executive Jen Metzger** wrote, “The health and safety of Ulster County residents is my first priority, and I understand your concerns and the concerns of the public to make sure that we are well-prepared to respond to a human-made disaster of this kind. I will do everything possible within the purview of my office and the County to protect our communities. This includes demanding regulatory action at the federal level to improve rail safety and prevent such a catastrophe from happening in the first place. At the local level, the County has plans in place to respond to these types of emergencies and stands ready to implement them.”

The full text of the letter is below:

February 27, 2023

Dear Supervisors and Mayors,

I write in response to your letter dated February 21, 2023, regarding the Ulster County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan, and your request that this plan be updated and communicated to the public in response to the recent train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio.

The health and safety of Ulster County residents is my first priority, and I understand your concerns and the concerns of the public to make sure that we are well-prepared to respond to a human-made disaster of this kind. I will do everything possible within the purview of my office and the County to protect our communities. This includes demanding regulatory action at the federal level to improve rail safety and prevent such a catastrophe from happening in the first place. At the local level, the County has plans in place to respond to these types of emergencies and stands ready to implement them.

As a clarification, the multi-jurisdictional plan referenced in your letter and the associated request for hazardous materials locations is a plan created for natural disasters and not for derailment or transportation incidents. The inventorying of hazardous materials within each municipality is to ensure that we have a clear picture of how those areas would be impacted during a natural disaster. For example, in an area prone to flooding during hurricane events, it is vital that we know what materials are in that zone and have the potential for additional impacts, environmental or otherwise, so that protective measures can be taken in advance of a natural disaster. With regard to rail shipments of hazardous materials, we are requesting that federal authorities notify the County government when such materials are scheduled to be transported through our communities.

The Ulster County Department of Emergency Services has a well-established hazardous material response plan in place in conjunction with local first responders. The response procedure involves determining objectives and response strategies, ensuring joint planning and application of tactical activities, and undertaking integrated planning and application of operational requirements, including emergency protective measures, containment, safety and security, and public information. Emergency service personnel at all levels are called upon to assist in the response operation, including industry representatives, private contractors, volunteer organizations, and State and Federal partners, such as the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Further, in response to Executive Order 125 issued by the State in 2014 regarding crude oil movement across New York State, Ulster County created Geographic Response Plans (GRPs). GRPs are map-based, location-specific incident plans that provide guidance to first responders to maintain situational awareness during the initial stages of incidents involving the transportation of crude oil and other hazardous substances. These are reviewed on a yearly basis with local first responders, with the most recent review at the beginning of this month.

I would also like to highlight the work of the County Hazmat Response Team, in which Ulster County coordinates with the City of Kingston Fire Department to provide hazardous materials response throughout Ulster County. The team is composed of highly trained hazardous materials technicians and advanced hazardous materials technicians and is at the ready 24/7 to respond to incidents throughout the County as part of a shared services agreement between the County and the City of Kingston.

Finally, it is important to note that while the Ohio derailment disaster has elevated public awareness of the dangers of train derailments involving hazardous materials, Ulster County has been preparing for such incidents for some time. The Ulster County Department of Emergency Services hosted an AWR 147 Rail Car Incident Response Training the first week of February 2023, and I am pleased to report two 8-hour trainings were held, one each in the Town of Ulster and the Town of Marlborough, and were well-attended by over 60 first responders from municipalities across the county. This awareness-level course is designed to increase the knowledge of first responders in recognizing and characterizing the different types of rail cars, potential leaks, and courses of action to be taken based on initial site assessment.

I appreciate your desire to have a greater understanding of the plans that have been created by and with your first responders and fire chiefs. To that end, I invite you to join us for an educational round table forum with representatives of your respective Fire Departments in jurisdictions with rail corridors in the municipality. We will be reaching out with details about this forum soon.

The Ohio train derailment points to the need for federal regulators to double down on regulatory efforts to prevent these types of accidents from happening in the first place by holding companies to stronger standards when it comes to train equipment and maintenance, as well as track repair in Ulster County and elsewhere, among other preventive actions. We are preparing a letter to the National Transportation Security Board, Federal Railway Administration, Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, and our Congressional representatives urging that tougher regulatory standards be put in place to prevent disasters like this from occurring in the future, and we will invite you to sign on to this letter.

I look forward to our continued work together to protect the health and safety of our Ulster County residents. We will be reaching out to you soon about the time and location of the educational roundtable. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me.

Sincerely,

Jen Metzger
Ulster County Executive

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