

The Precautionary Principle

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What happened?

Early 2023, a **train transporting hazardous chemicals derailed** in East Palestine, Ohio, **spilling carcinogenic chemicals into the area.**

The train company (Norfolk Southern) **burned the chemicals** in a controlled fire, **expanding the affected area by 1.6 km.**

What are the ethical issues?

Lack of regulation in handling of hazardous chemicals has led to both environmental and health related consequences, which **could have been avoided** by following the precautionary principle.

Solution

The solution that makes use of the **precautionary principle would have cautioned against burning the spilled chemicals**

The precautionary principle

The precautionary principle making use of **scientific understanding** to take action to **avoid harm** that might otherwise occur and considering the **pros and cons of the action** in a broader context. Lastly, making sure that the **effort behind the action is reasonable** given the potential harm it is intended to address.

What are the consequences?

The initial consequences of the disaster were the **toxic fumes ascending from the burnt chemicals.** This led to an evacuation in a 1 by 2 mile radius of the town.

They still **don't know much about the long-term consequences** of the spill, but what is known is that **3,500 fish across 12 species have died** from chemicals spilled due to the train derailment. The fish lived in three waterways near East Palestine. Also some **East Palestine residents complained about headaches and feeling sick.**

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References

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