



Delaware Riverkeeper Remains Vigilant on Trinseo Chemical Spill to the Delaware River

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Delaware River - Bristol, PA - Philadelphia, PA – The Delaware Riverkeeper Network is urging continued vigilance regarding the Delaware River chemical spill, including more robust and proactive communications from responsible agencies and environmental monitoring in addition to robust drinking water monitoring. A site visit by the Delaware Riverkeeper shows continuing clean-up efforts along Otter Creek at the site of the responsible facility owned by Trinseo. But continuing efforts to monitor and secure information and data regarding the chemical release, the emergency response, the status of drinking water safety, and the potential impacts for the environment, continue to yield questions about the release and the deficient public communication from the incident command and involved government agencies.

“It is notable that while the Philadelphia Water Department held a live press conference on Monday the 27th at 5 pm, we are not seeing that kind of positive and proactive public information sharing from the other lead agencies, including the U.S. Coast Guard, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection or other involved state and federal agencies. This spill has impacted our entire region – it potentially implicated four drinking water systems on both sides of the River, not just Philadelphia’s, as well as natural environments including Otter Creek, Mill Creek, Bristol Marsh and the Delaware River. The level of information being released to the public continues to be incredibly deficient and undermines public trust in the information that is being released,” states Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper and leader of the regional environmental advocacy organization the Delaware Riverkeeper Network. Ms van Rossum adds, “the Monday evening Philadelphia Water Department press conference shows an enhanced effort to provide information to the concerned public but after several days of little or confusing information the level of community trust is clearly lacking.”

“But I was pleased that the SouthEast Regional Office of the Pennsylvania DEP has been responsive to my outreach and requests for information, recognizing the importance of grassroots organizations like my Delaware Riverkeeper Network in helping to disseminate information to the public, but also to gather public input and share it with involved agencies. We are not seeing that kind of responsiveness from the U.S. Coast Guard, nor have we seen proactive efforts to inform and engage the public from incident command and other impacted agencies. This failure to be proactive in engaging with the public leaves people in the

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dark and creates worry, rather than helping people make decisions based on solid information,” van Rossum adds.

“While we are learning more about sampling and data regarding drinking water impacts, which is certainly a high priority, we are not confident that there is needed sampling and monitoring of impacts to natural ecosystems,” shares Delaware Riverkeeper van Rossum. Mill Creek/Otter Creek is identified in PA DEP’s 2022 integrated report as impaired for aquatic life as a result of multiple assaults including siltation, sedimentation, urban runoff/storm sewers. “Adding this chemical spill to these localized creeks adds insult to injury for these already impacted ecosystems, home to species such as native eels and the benthic invertebrates they feed upon,” adds van Rossum.

According to the Delaware Riverkeeper Network, Bristol Marsh is a unique habitat and wetland along and at the mouth of Otter and Mill Creeks and is one of the last remaining freshwater marshes along the Delaware River. Although the tidal freshwater marsh is small and surrounded by commercial development, six rare plants native to the Delaware River tidal marshes thrive there: Multi-flowered mud plantain, Long-Lobed Arrow-Head, Subulate Arrow-Head, Waterhemp Ragweed, Swamp Beggar-Ticks, and Indian Wild Rice. Dependent on daily tidal flushing, these and other highly specialized wetland plants, nearly extirpated from Pennsylvania, comprise part of a marsh ecosystem that functions as a nursery, pollution filter and water purifier for the Delaware River. Learn more about this precious marsh ecosystem at:

<https://www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/places-we-protect/bristol-marsh-preserve-the-nature-conservancy/>

“There are many questions we at the Delaware Riverkeeper Network believe are in need of agency attention and public disclosure,” van Rossum adds. Among them:

- Why are other water purveyors not proactively sharing information along with the Philadelphia Water Department in order to help provide information and allay the concerns of all communities in the region that receive drinking water from the Delaware River system?
- Why has the U.S. Coast Guard and other agencies associated with incident command not held daily press conferences to share information regarding the spill and emergency response efforts?
- Why has a special website not been established to provide a single location for securing the most up to date information on the spill and the clean up response including information covering New Jersey and Delaware, and where information can be found regarding drinking water and environmental impacts?
- Why has incident command not proactively told community members where they could report eyewitness sightings that may be of value to the response effort? What is that number and/or email address?
- What data are being collected to assess the impacts of the chemical spill to impacted ecosystems along the Mill Creek/Otter Creek and the Bristol Marsh, as well as the Delaware River, testing we understand is being collected?
- What does all natural resources monitoring, to the degree it has been happened, show?
- What is the ratio of chemicals discharged? They note the 3 chemicals (listed above) with 50% water and 50% polymer - but what is the percent of each of three chemicals that was discharged?
- What response do emergency responders and regulatory agencies have to Trinseo’s announcement that it is planning to resume operations in the coming days?
- Is the actual cause of the spill confirmed by regulatory agencies and what investigations have been done to ensure there will not be any repeat releases when operations resume?

- The estimate of 8,100 gallons of chemical release seems to have been determined by Trinseo, what efforts have been undertaken by regulatory agencies to confirm the volume of the chemical release? Is there any question that the spill may have been a greater amount?

The Delaware Riverkeeper Network frequently organizes volunteer monitors to help gather and report visual data, photo documentation, or other information helpful in an emergency response or to monitor legal compliance of infrastructure projects (such as pipelines) during construction - this work has also helped to communicate the importance of not interfering with emergency response efforts or for community members to put themselves in harms way by seeking to gather information or data that must be left to professionals. In recognition of the Delaware Riverkeeper Network's value added role in such capacities, Delaware Riverkeeper Maya van Rossum was an appointed member of the Delaware River and Bay Oil Spill Advisory Committee which explored the value added role of community organizations, volunteers and community members in the wake of a catastrophic environmental incident.

The Delaware Riverkeeper Network is the only environmental advocacy organization working to protect the entire Delaware River system, including the mainstem, tributaries and its watershed. The Delaware Riverkeeper Network has often served as an important partner, helping to mobilize and guide community volunteerism when and however appropriate in the wake of catastrophic spill events including oil spills, chemical spills and other catastrophes for our Delaware River system. For more information on the organization see www.DelawareRiverkeeper.org.

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