

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

March 27, 2025

The Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary of Transportation
US Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary of Transportation Duffy:

I write to express deep concern over the apparent closure of the Department of Transportation's Western Regional Hazardous Materials Office, based in my congressional district.¹ This office is responsible for overseeing the safe transportation of hazardous materials throughout Alaska, American Samoa, Arizona, California, Colorado, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. In the wake of the East Palestine train derailment, I am shocked that there are any efforts underway to undermine the safety of Americans from dangerous materials traveling through their communities.

The Western Regional Hazardous Materials Office, as part of the Pipeline and Hazardous Material Safety Administration (PHSMA), was established to oversee the safe and secure movement of daily shipments of hazardous materials by all modes of transportation. According to the Department of Transportation, there are more than 1 million shipments of hazardous materials each day in the United States. This ranges from the transport of dangerous and corrosive gases to explosive materials to nuclear waste.

It is disturbing to me that the Trump Administration would attempt to pull back on the nationwide reach of the agency responsible for the safe transportation of these materials. Our nation is still learning the lessons of the East Palestine train derailment, and Vice President Vance recently stated that "we continue to need to do better on rail safety in this country."² This lease termination flies in the face of that goal.

To better understand the reasoning behind this effort, and as a member of the Appropriations subcommittee tasked with the oversight of your agency and this office, I request answers to the following questions by April 15, 2025:

1. When was the decision made to terminate the lease at the Western Regional Hazardous Materials Office?
2. Was this decision made by career staff at the Department of Transportation, by political appointees at the General Services Administration (GSA), or by 'special employees' from

¹ <https://www.phmsa.dot.gov/about-phmsa/offices/western-region>

² <https://apnews.com/article/east-palestine-derailment-norfolk-southern-lawsuits-e0ffc66465143733e9b0fec31f27871b>

the DOGE office embedded within the Department of Transportation, GSA. or elsewhere?

3. Staff in the Ontario office is responsible for overseeing the safe transportation of hazardous materials for the entire western United States. Where will they be performing this work from now, if not from the office in Ontario, California? Have staff been notified of this change?
4. ? How does this lease termination affect requirements for staff at the Western Regional Office to report to work in person? Where will they be expected to report?
5. How many staff at PHSMA have retired, been terminated as part of efforts to terminate probationary employees, or otherwise left PHMSA since January 21, 2025?

I ask that this lease termination be immediately rescinded, so that staff can continue their effective work on behalf of the American people. I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress