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The Columbus Dispatch

WEDNESDAY, JULY 16, 2025 | DISPATCH.COM 154 YEARS | SINCE 1871 PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

Toxic gas cloud leads to shelter-in-place order



Columbus Fire cordons off an area around Souder Avenue and River Street in Franklinton due to a chemical leak in the area on July 14. ADAM CAIRNS/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Chemical manufacturer has past Ohio EPA violations

Shahid Meighan, Jordan Laird and Emma Wozniak Columbus Dispatch | USA TODAY NETWORK

A Columbus chemical manufacturer behind the release of a toxic gas cloud on Monday, July 14, that led to a shelter-in-place order for people in Franklinton has a prior history of environmental violations, a Dispatch review shows. ● GFS Chemicals, whose company offices are located at 851 McKinley Ave., has received 10 notices of violation from the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency over the past decade, each listing multiple Ohio Administrative Code or Ohio Revised Code violations found during routine compliance inspections, according to the Ohio EPA’s eDocument Search.

Firefighters and police responded July 14 to a GFS Chemicals manufacturing building at 777 River St. next to Franklinton Cemetery after receiving reports of an odor across the area. Columbus Division of Fire Battalion Chief Jeffrey Geitter said 911 callers were reporting a “foreign odor” in the area. Firefighters, including hazmat, responded and

got to the scene about 2:20 p.m., he said. “We responded and found a yellowish cloud,” Geitter said. “That cloud has dissipated over time. Since we’ve been here, there hasn’t been any further (release).” GFS, whose company offices are at 851 McKinley

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From unfazed to uneasiness, neighbors react to leak at the Franklinton plant

Some weren’t surprised: ‘It’s happened before’

Shahid Meighan Columbus Dispatch USA TODAY NETWORK

Some residents of Columbus’ Franklinton neighborhood, who live or work near a chemical manufacturing plant that was the site of a gaseous chemical leak, expressed uneasiness about the incident, while others said they were unfazed or unaware of it. A portion of Franklinton was placed under a shelter-in-place order on the afternoon of July 14 after a chemical leak from the GFS Chemicals building

at 777 River St. Neighboring residents called Columbus police to report the plume of yellow smoke and a foul odor in the air. At around 2:20 p.m., Columbus firefighters arrived to assess the spread of the fumes while Columbus police shut down streets in the area. Columbus Division of Fire Battalion Chief Jeffrey Geitter said the yellow smoke was the result of GFS workers trying to neutralize an acidic solution — a normal process for the company — when something happened and it became a corrosive gas. Geitter said early on July 15 that fire investigators did not know what kind of gas had leaked out of the facility into

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GFS Chemicals at 851 McKinley Ave. in the city’s Franklinton neighborhood. A chemical leak from the facility prompted a shelter-in-place-order for a portion of Franklinton and other nearby areas. SHAHID MEIGHAN/ COLUMBUS DISPATCH



Gov. Mike DeWine stands at a podium to address Ohio workforce needs along with Lt. Gov. Jon Husted and Ohio Business Roundtable President and CEO Pat Tiberi, right, in June 2023. DeWine recently appointed Tiberi to join Ohio State University’s Board of Trustees. BENJAMIN LANKA/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

SB 1 boosts the power of college trustees

Gov. DeWine named 21 appointments recently

Sheridan Hendrix Columbus Dispatch USA TODAY NETWORK

Nearly two dozen trustees will soon begin the academic year as the newest board members of Ohio’s public universities at the same time a sweeping new higher education law strengthened university trustees’ roles at their institutions. Each of Ohio’s 14 public universities and 23 community colleges has its own boards of trustees. Trustees are appointed by the governor and charged by the state legislature with the responsibility of governing their respective school, from setting tuition prices to hiring new presidents. Each school has between nine and 15 trustees, all of whom are unpaid. Gov. Mike DeWine’s office announced 21 new trustee appointments this summer, most of whom were announced on the same day that Senate Bill 1 officially went into effect.

What changes does Senate Bill 1 make to university trustees?

SB 1, formally known as the Advance Ohio Higher Education Act, is a massive overhaul of the state’s higher education ecosystem. The new law, among other things, bans diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programs on campus, bans faculty strikes, limits the power of tenure among university educators and prevents higher education institutions from taking positions on “controversial beliefs or policies.” It also gives trustees significantly more control over certain university operations. Trustees are now tasked with creating new university policies, like prohibiting campus offices related to DEI and requiring that courses “demonstrate intellectual diversity” before approval. Trustees will be responsible for eliminating low-enrollment academic programs, as well as adopting an

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